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**The contribution of the digital revolution to Korea's
democracy, with a focus on political communications,
from 1993 to 2018**

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**A dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
to the Department of Politics and International Studies at the
University of Warwick**

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I, Kyounghee Cho, declare that any portion of the work stated in the thesis has not been submitted in support of an application for another degree, or qualification of other institutes of learning.

Abstract

The research aim is to figure out the relationship between the development of digital communication and democracy using Korea as a case study (specifically focusing on 1993 to 2018, the period when digitalisation and political democratisation took place in earnest). To do this, two specific main research questions are set up, focusing on the historical digital developmental process and the present political communications through digital media in Korean society, respectively. To solve the research questions, preliminary investigation, including web analysis as well as the documentary analysis, is implemented. Most of the background information about the selected interview candidates and organisations is found out by preliminary investigations. Interviews are conducted during a two-month-long fieldwork period in Korea from 27 July 2017 to 30 September 2017, regarding both the democratic transition to Korean politics and society. Interview data are mostly collected from face-to-face interviews with civil servants and experts.

The literature review on political communication and democracy in the digital age helps to figure out the theoretical ideas, which raised further questions for examination. This study comprehensively analyses the changes of the media environment and political communications at both the governmental level and societal level in the digital era. In order to understand the overall circumstances of Korea, the specific Korean historical, political, economic, and cultural contexts are examined first, before the development of the Korean digital infrastructure is investigated. On this basis, understanding the digital development process in Korea, how digital communication affects Korean democracy is scrutinised by analysing the

digital media use in the political realm at the aspect of the civil society as well as the government in the recent democratisation process.

Empirical data and findings in this Korean case study support the argument that digital communication has a democratic function, even if it is accompanying non-democratic social issues, and it supports direct and participatory democracies rather than representative democracy.

List of Abbreviations

ASAP: American Society for Public Administration

CEG: Council for Excellence in Government

GAO: General Accounting Office

GIA: Government Information Agency

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

IMD: International Institute for Management Development

IMF: International Monetary Funds

IPF: Informatisation Promotion Fund

ISH: Information Super Highway

ITU: International Telecommunication Union

KASP: Korean Association for Policy Studies

KCIA: Korean Central Intelligence Agency

KICOA: Korea Internet Communication Association

KII: Korean Information Infrastructure

KIJA: Korea Internet-media Journalists Association

KIPA: Korea Institute of Public Administration

KISA: Korea Internet and Security Agency

KISDI: Korea Information Society Development Institute

KLRI: Korea Legislation Research Institute

KT: Korea Telecom

MCIE: Ministry of Commerce Industry and Energy

MCPA: Ministry of Culture and Public Affairs

MCST: Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism

MCT: Ministry of Culture and Tourism

MIC: Ministry of Information and Communication

MKE: Ministry of Knowledge-Economy

MOC: Ministry of Communication

MOE: Ministry of Education

MOHW: Ministry of Health and Welfare

MOIS: Ministry of Interior and Safety

MOSF: Ministry of Strategy and Finance

MPAS: Ministry of Public Administration and Security

MSIT: Ministry of Science and ICTs

MST: Ministry of Science and Technology

NCA: National Computerisation Agency

NIA: National Information Society Agency

NII: National Information Initiatives

NIS: National Intelligence Service

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PC: Personal Computers

PPP: Public-Private Partnership

PSPD: People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy

SNSs: Social Networking Sites

SOFA: Status of Forces Agreement

STEPI: Science and Technology Policy Institute

UN: United Nations

WEF: The World Economic Forum

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction: the age of digital information

As society is a system in which all individuals, factors, and components are interconnected, social components such as politics, economics, technology, and society cannot be understood independently. The media ranging from the existing traditional mass media to digital media do not act as an integrated societal force but as a complex set of institutions. The technological, social, and economic drivers of the development of communication have contributed considerably to the ever-accelerating expansion of the range of media. In particular, new media based on advanced digital technology are shaped by internal organisational, economic, and technical features as well as by external societal conditions.

Furthermore, the fast dissemination of digital media for mass use is not limited to the industrialised countries anymore, where the average rate of access to the Internet is about 58.8 per cent (the Internet World Stats 2019¹). During the last twenty years, the progress of mobile digital devices and platforms has dramatically improved, and the ubiquitous mobility of the Internet drastically evolved, which is increasingly global in scale. As people's usages of the newer digital platforms such as Social Networking Sites (hereafter "SNSs") and mobile instant messengers are prevalent across the world more and more, the characteristics and role of the media in various societies are also increasingly in transition.

In particular, "The advanced digital technology is embedded in deep-rooted normative, social, political and economic forces" (Curran et al. 2016: 174). In the

¹<https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

contemporary ‘information age (Castell 2011a)’, digital communication among people and organisations is regarded as a significant political, economic and cultural activity. In the digital age, which is the period in which a significant part of social communications takes part in digitally-encoded devices, digital mediated political communication has become central to politics and public life in contemporary democracies. The drivers of digital communication are digital information and communication technologies, which have been intensely changing various aspects of societies, including politics, economy, and democracy.

Through a combination of social and technological changes (Cho 2016), digital media have influenced the ways that politicians and civil servants communicate, which are deeply enmeshed in the political process. On the one hand, digital media communication has affected political communication at the governmental level, such as the promotion of elections, campaigning, national image-making, political advertising, and collecting public opinions. It is regarded that various digital communication platforms such as SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter can play a pivotal role to increase the openness of the government’s communications and provide information accessibility about government policies to the public rapidly.

On the other hand, digital communication technology is regarded as offering citizens more opportunities to participate in politics by letting them organise collective behaviours and form coalitions on a universal level. At the public level, people in contemporary societies can digitally engage with others easily and have more opportunities to interact with one another through digital platforms. By communicating with one another, people can create public spheres in digital spaces without physical contact. In this regard, it can be considered that digital communication can help the

people in the digital age enhance their social empowerment in the political and democratisation processes (Hobbs & Moore 2013).

In this vein, it can be regarded that the potential of new communication offered by digital technology has brought about political and social transformation in many democratic countries (Fenton 2016a: 30). Furthermore, political communications through digital media in democratic societies can act as a means of social change. However, there are also many observers who consider that the use of digital media as political communication tools in contemporary democratic societies can pose a challenge as much as an opportunity for democratic politics. It still needs to scrutinise if digital communication technologies enhance democracy in democratic societies.

1.2. Research background: digital media and democracy across Asian countries

As world politics and society have become increasingly digital-mediated since the 1990s (Chadwick & Stanyer 2010: 2), political communication through digital media has received a large amount of academic attention (Hsu & Park 2012: 169). Many scholars have investigated various respects of the relationship between democracy and digital media communication (Jennings & Zeitner 2003; Jenkins 2006; Fox & Ramos 2011; Price 2013; Giansante 2015; Allen & Light 2015; Lee 2017). Among these scholars, while some argue that digital technologies have a political effect on democracy, others claim that the impact of digital media on democracy cannot be seen only with an optimistic view because digital communication may bring about a result of undermining democratic values rather than supporting democracy.

Optimists such as Papacharssi (2004) and Dahlgren (2005) argue that digital communication has the potential to enhance democracy by emphasising the aspect of

the digital media impacts on expanding public participation in politics. In this regard, Dahlgren (2005: 160) maintains that ‘public sphere on digital platforms which is at the forefront of evolving the public’s political participation can be allowing citizens to play a role in the development of new democratic politics’. Mazzoleni (2015: 182) also argues that digital technology contributes to the development of democratic ideals perhaps more effectively and more rapidly than when people lived in a non-networked society by diffusing a sense of empowerment in the participants in building a strong identity and attracting new followers and activists.

In contrast, some critics argue that the digital media’s ability to promote democracy is limited, and they have even hold it responsible for many of the deficiencies that established democracies appear to suffer from (Entman 1989; Voltmer 2006: 1). They claim that digital media technology can instead bring about social inequality by leading to a growing digital divide in democratic freedoms (see, Dimaggio et al. 2004; Ragnedda & Muschert 2013; Hargittai 2018). In this regard, Gagnon and Chou (2018: 8) argue, “The democratic ideal of popular participation is not always compatible with good governance”, and may not lead to democracy.

Extensive research on the political implications of digital technology has mainly been conducted in Western contexts. According to Jamil (2018), many Western studies have revealed that there is a positive relationship between the use of digital media and political mobilisation, the public’s participation and democratisation during the election campaign (Coleman 2002; Castells & Sey 2004; Dalrymple & Scheufele 2007; Boulianne 2009). However, different countries have different historical, political and cultural characteristics (Park & Kluver 2009: 506), especially regarding the levels of political and societal development of the nations. In this context, Lee (2017) argues that

it may be possible that regional cases in Asia differ from what has been generally agreed to be the case in Western democracies.

Countries in Asia are diverse in structure due to discrepancies in democratic institutionalisation (Lee 2017: 66). After the overthrow of the Philippines' dictator, Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, the third wave of democratisation occurred in South Korea and Taiwan in the late 1980s (ibid). Furthermore, while significant elections to threaten the incumbent leader took place in Thailand and Indonesia during the 1990s and in Malaysia in 2008, other Asian countries such as Singapore and Vietnam have been persistently maintained their regime (ibid).

In the meantime, while South Korea and Taiwan experienced a democratic transition that brought about the emergence of postindustrial society, some Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam have achieved industrialisation under the restriction of civil society with different extents (ibid). Besides, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, have been experiencing democratic transition without the growth of the middle class (ibid). While all the countries across the Asian region share a political culture such as Confucianism and developmentalism (Lee 2017: 67), the levels of democratisation and economic development are varying.

In addition, countries have contrasted levels of digital development depending on political and social systems. In terms of Asian digital development, the International Telecommunication Union [ITU] survey in 2014 shows many Asian nations' digital penetration rates, ranging from 17 per cent in Indonesia, 35 per cent in Thailand, 40 per cent in the Philippines, and 48 per cent in Vietnam to 68 per cent in Malaysia, 82 per cent in Singapore, 84 per cent both in Taiwan and in South Korea (Lee 2017: 67). Although this survey demonstrates that Asian countries vary widely in access to the

Internet and the level of digital development, it also proves that the Asian region is being digitally mediated regardless of socio-economic conditions (ibid).

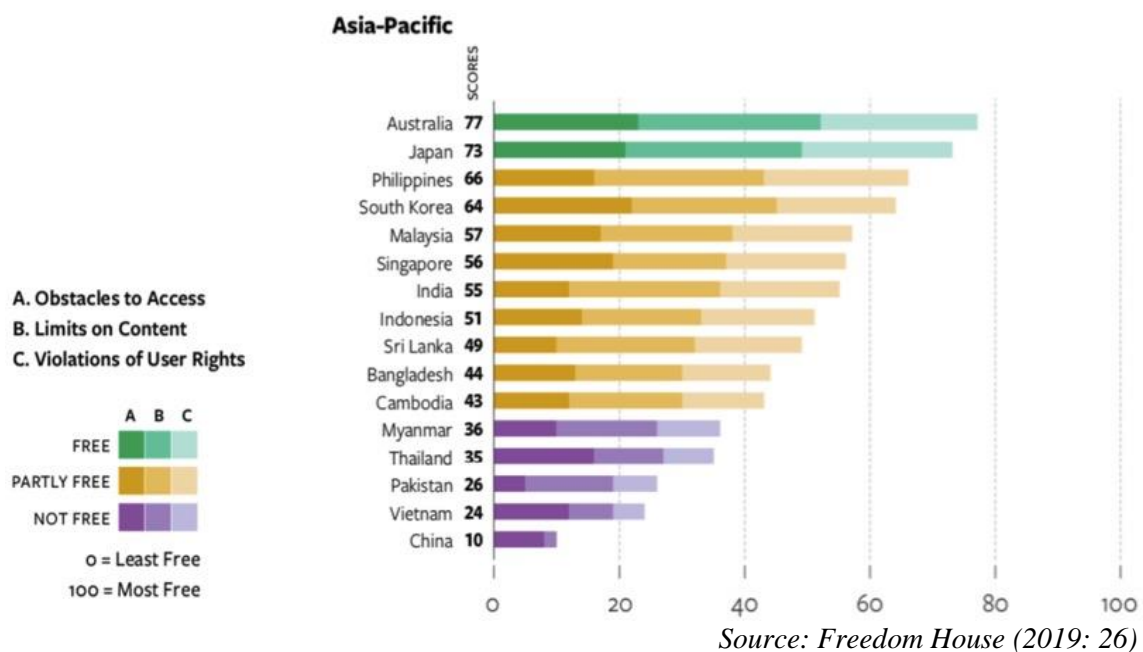
“Digital culture in society can be shaped by its socio-economic, political and cultural circumstances and is likely to be part of the political culture of the region” (Lee 2017: 62). Contemporary Asian countries are increasingly digitally mediated, and its impact is extended to the level of democracy. The pattern of digital technology distribution in the Asian region has drawn academic attention to its impact on the democratic landscape and often ‘goes beyond cross-country variation between democracy and dictatorship, as well as those between rich and poor countries (Lee 2015)’ (ibid). Considering this, the prevalent issue in the digital age is ‘how digital media have transformed democracy in many different settings and contexts’ (Nugroho & Syarief 2012: 10).

In this vein, many political researchers have paid attention to democracy in Asian countries in the digital age (see, Nair 2007; Mukherjee 2010; Aday et al. 2010; Nugroho & Syarief 2012; Abbott 2012; Thompson 2015; Case 2015; Lee 2015; Arghiros 2016; Pelinka 2017; Weller 2018; Neher 2018). Among these scholars, Nair (2007) particularly argues that digital democracy in Asia has been improved in terms of communication efficiency resulted from the introduction of digital channels operated by governments. According to Abbott (2012: 334), the impact of political communication based on digital networking is playing a significant role in nurturing and enabling democratisation in Asia.

In this regard, Freedom House announced rankings of freedom on the net in the Asia-Pacific region in 2019, which illustrates Internet freedom enhancements and

deteriorations by different political systems. According to this recent data (*Figure 1*²), we can notice that countries in Asia are placed in different phases of democratisation process respectively even if they are in the same geographical region. Furthermore, it can be regarded that economic development and political stability does not always guarantee a better state of democracy. In this sense, when analysing democracy, “It is crucial to make a clear distinction between the explanations of transitions to and consolidations of democracy” (Rustow 1970).

Figure 1. Rankings of freedom on the net in the Asia-Pacific region



While existing studies do provide historical background knowledge to future studies, they cannot explain the currently changing dynamics in contemporary societies. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical studies considering the contemporary countries’

²Ratings are determined through an examination of three broad categories: A. OBSTACLES TO ACCESS: Assesses infrastructural and economic barriers to access; government efforts to block specific applications or technologies; and legal, regulatory, and ownership control over internet and mobile phone access providers. B. LIMITS ON CONTENT: Examines filtering and blocking of websites; other forms of censorship and self-censorship; manipulation of content; the diversity of online news media; and usage of digital media for social and political activism. C. VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS: Measures legal protections and restrictions on online activity; surveillance; privacy; and repercussions for online activity, such as legal prosecution, imprisonment, physical attacks, or other forms of harassment.

democratic transformations resulting from digital development. Considering the fast-changing digital technology and political environment, studies about the relationship between digital technology and democracy reflecting the contemporary societies' chronological features and local political situations are more needed. In this vein, further studies need to be conducted focusing on filling these academic gaps with the in-depth empirical study of an exemplary case among Asian countries.

1.3. Research aims and questions

The present study presents empirical evidence on how the link between digital development and democracy evolves and develops over time across different contexts in one country (Nugroho & Syarief 2012: 10). In this vein, considering the research background, we pursue two research questions: *“How has digital communication technology influenced democratisation in contemporary Asian democratic societies?”* and *“What kind of democracies does the new digital communication induce and support?”*

It is not only impossible to study all the cases of democratic countries in the world, but even assuming it is possible, it is complicated to draw in-depth research results. Moreover, since all countries have unique political and social backgrounds, the research questions need to be studied considering the political, economic, cultural, and digital developmental specificities of each country. Thus, the current research will focus on South Korea (the Republic of Korea, hereafter “Korea”), one of the countries now widely regarded as democratic in Asia. By using Korea which is one of the most technically advanced digital countries in the world, the author will investigate the impact of the use of digital technologies by the government and civil society on democracy.

Korea is a country where both economic and democratisation have developed at a high level quickly compared to other Asian countries. Korea is also the leading example of a country rising from a low level of ICTs access to one of the highest in the world (Chung 2015: 107). It had a considerable increase in ICTs uptake, earlier and faster than other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] countries. Above all, notable changes caused by technological and environmental advances have influenced political communications, not only between the government and the people but also among citizens in Korea. More importantly, democratic transformation through digital media in the political arena can be easily identified in contemporary Korea.

In this context, Korea can be a good example of a country for research to analyse the relationship between democracy and digital communications in the digital era. (More details about the reasons of the case selection are described in section 2.2.3). Through the Korean case study, the author will examine the relationship between democratisation and the development of digital communication from a macroscopic point of view. To do this, the relationship between the process of democratisation and digital communication changes in the government and the society will be scrutinised, examining the relationship between the two processes if they are independent, or tightly linked, or if one drove the other. Also, it is to examine what type of democracy digital media have enhanced, or weakened by considering its national context and on-going democratisation process.

As mentioned above, it is necessary to analyse social phenomena with an integrated view, as the social components are closely interconnected. Thus, in this study, the author will scrutinise the Korean case considering its historical, cultural, societal, economic and political traits in this research. Furthermore, it will be examined how the

present Korean digital communications both at the level of the government and of the public have been operated in a certain political context and how they have affected democracy in the state from a microscopic point of view. By investigating the digital-mediated political communications in Korea has experienced and experiencing, the author tries to find out the future direction of a democratic society in the digital age.

The research seeks to provide a new understanding of the relationship between fast-changing governmental digital communication in Korea and the country's democratisation process. Although a process of democratisation took place extensively in Korea in the late 1980s, it is noted that the Korean authoritarian military regime ended since the regime changes in 1993, with the transition from authoritarian military regimes to the first civilian regime. Given that, to understand the historical background of Korean politics, the current study will describe the history of Korea from when it was established, but will mainly focus on the political and social changes due to digital development from 1993 to 2018.

Although one may doubt if the civilian government under Kim Young-sam is from genuinely civilian power because the government was founded in a new party merged by two conservative party leaders and one defected from the progressive party in 1990, the political regime change in 1992 still can be regarded as a critical political and democratic turning point in Korea. This is because it was the first time that a civilian who was not a military general-in-mufti retiring from the military became the Korean president since the early 1960s (Kim 2000b: 17). Furthermore, since 1993 Korea has begun to concentrate on digital development in earnest by establishing a national ICT control tower, the Ministry of Information and Communication [MIC], in 1994 (MOIS 2017: 98). In this context, the year of 1993 can be regarded as a decisive turning point to digital society as well as the democratisation of Korea.

With these ideas in mind, the present study proposes the following general research questions divided into the historical background and contemporary situation. The latter is also divided into political and societal dimensions. Their sub-questions accompany each general research question:

R1. How has Korea's digital communication changed over the last twenty-five years?

- *What has been the politics of the Korean government's massive investment in digital communication?*
- *What factors have affected Korea to become a digital powerhouse?*

R2. How has digital communication in Korea affected Korean democracy since 1993? Overall, what kind of democracy has it promoted and supported?

- *R2-1. How has governmental digital communication affected democracy in Korea?*
 - ✓ *How has the Korean governments' digital communication changed in the processes of the Korean political democratisation?*
 - ✓ *What has been the relationship between the development of digital communication and the process of democratisation of the successive Korean regimes?*
 - ✓ *How has the Korean governments' digital communication related to landmark political events?*
- *R2-2. How has digital communication at the societal level affected democracy in Korea?*
 - ✓ *How has the digital communication of Koreans transformed their political participation?*
 - ✓ *How has the digital communication of Koreans changed the political power relationship between the government and Koreans?*
 - ✓ *How has the digital communication of Koreans related to landmark political events?*

1.4. Hypotheses

Since the emergence of the digital age, many scholars have increasingly included the political effect of digital media usage in their analysis of democracy. Turning to the 2000s, many scholars have tended to pay attention to the impacts of government's digital communication on democracy in societies on a broader scale, rather than merely focusing on an administrative efficiency standpoint (Chadwick 2003; Clift 2004; Malina 2005; Lee 2006a; Freeman & Quirke 2013; Veit & Huntgebruth 2013; Graham 2014; Giansante 2015; McChesney 2015; Entman & Usher 2018). In this context, Jorba and Bimber (2012) argue that it became feasible to analyse patterns across democracies and non-democracies that used to be challenging to scrutinise in the digital age (Anduiza 2012: 16-18).

Democracy can be defined as a state system where people can exercise power by voting, which is only the way for people to express their wishes. In fact, the democratic idea originally from Greece, which is δημοκρατία *dēmokratía* that is meaning 'rule by people', is widely accepted and valued throughout the centuries and across different cultures. "The classic democratic assumptions and practices of Greek can be very different from those of modern democrats" (Birch 2001). In particular, while Greek practice granted only a minority of the adult inhabitants of the city, the modern democracy in the present digital age seems to have expanded the range of political participants through the side present of digital media. In this regard, Sartori argues, "Modern people want another democracy in the sense that ideal democracy in the present era is no longer the same as that of the Greeks" (Sartori 1987: 279 cited by Birch 2001).

Depending on the types of political participation by the people, the types of democracies can be distinguished as: 'direct democracy' and 'representative

democracy'. While the former emphasises ordinary people's political rights in the decision-making process, the latter emphasises the authority of the representatives whom the people elected. 'Direct democracy' can be regarded as 'participatory democracy' as both concepts of democracies are supported by the public's direct political participation (see, Schiller 2007).

Democracy in the contemporary era is associated with diverse democracy manifestations (Gagnon 2013: 5). In particular, many scholars argue that in the digital age there are links between usage of digital media, civic engagement and ordinary people's political participation. Regarding this, Hague and Loader (1999: 6) argue that given the complexity of modern nation-states where the people have little opportunity to influence the political environment, digital media's communicational nature can help solve the concerns about the minimised political participation of the public.

Regarding this, Barber (2001) argues that digital technology had the 'potential to strengthen or to weaken democracy', depending on the characteristics of democracies. He maintains that there was a potential relationship not between digital technology and democracy, but between certain specific features of technology and distinctive features of the several models of democracy (ibid). Interactive characteristics of the digital technologies can promote civic engagement and communication between the members of society regarding matters of common concern to any notion of 'strong democracy' (Putnam 1993; Hague & Loader 1999: 8).

Some scholars have argued that digital media communication has played a role in shaping democracy by expanding public participation. Held (1987: 271) claims that digital communication technologies support 'participatory democracy' by improving the 'poor resource base of social groups' and sustaining 'direct participation of citizens in the regulation of the key institutions of society, including the workplace and local

community' (Malina 1999, 2005; Hague & Loader 1999: 31). In this vein, Barber (2001) agreed with Held, arguing that features of digital communication technology can serve a more participatory democracy than a representative form of democracy.

More recently, some observers, such as Loader and Mercea (2011), Aalberg et al. (2012), Schroeder (2018) and Jamil (2018), claim that a more democratic, participatory culture can be shaped by digital media communication and it enables people to take part in politics and democratisation. However, although a number of observers argue that digital media has the potential to enhance democracy by expanding participatory culture, many critics argue that the use of digital media as political communication tools in contemporary countries can pose a challenge as much as an opportunity for democratic politics. This is because, despite the achievement of digital technology development, there are still many countries suffering from obviously lack of democracy.

Governmental regulation and manipulation of public opinion on digital spaces have been documented in contemporary democratic countries across the world, such as the U.S., the European Union member countries and East Asian countries including Korea (see, Venturelli 2002; Verhulst 2006; Citron & Norton 2011; Howard & Hussain 2013; Bradshaw & Howard 2018). In addition to this, in many countries digital media act as a tool for authoritarian stability and durability such as China and the Middle East (see, Howard & Hussain 2013; Gunitsky 2015). In this sense, Freedom House (2019: 6) states, "Digital platforms are regarded as the new battleground for democracy", explaining that major political forces in authoritarian countries in Asia have expanded their efforts to control digital spaces over the past years (Freedom House 2019) (see,

Financial Times, 16 January 2018³; The Guardian, 28 April 2019⁴; The Guardian, 25 November 2019⁵).

Considering this, it can be considered that the democratic ideal in the digital age is not always compatible with all kinds of digitally developed countries. Moreover, given how undemocratic countries navigate the digital age, we can assume that depending on the characteristics of the political forces of each country, based on different political ideologies, the democratic function of digital communications may be operated differently. In this vein, it still seems that the concept of democracy needs to be revisited considering country-specific digital developments. Democracies need to be understood by reflecting on a certain state's social and political setting and cultural specificities.

Given these ideas, this research formulates the following hypothesis.

H1. The intensive digital government project of the Korean government has contributed to expand the public's political participation.

H2. Digital technologies in Korea have promoted the participatory and deliberative dimensions of democracy over its representative dimension.

H3. Governments with different ideological orientations have different reasons for promoting digital media, and different levels of democratic use of them.

1.5. Why South Korea?

At present, it seems obvious that a large amount of the population in Korea uses digital technologies in very diversified ways. It is generally believed that the

³ "China disrupts global companies' web access as censorship bites"
<https://www.ft.com/content/80e50a6c-fa8a-11e7-9b32-d7d59aace167>

⁴ "Russia's great firewall: is it meant to keep information in-or out?"
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/apr/28/russia-great-firewall-sovereign-internet-bill-keeping-information-in-or-out>

⁵ "Singapore invokes 'fake news' law for first time over Facebook post"
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/25/singapore-fake-news-law-facebook-brad-bowyer>

development of ICTs brought about a new paradigm of the overall Korean democratic society. Many changes in the everyday life of Koreans due to digital media development seem to influence politics and democratisation in Korea considerably. More importantly, based on the wide range of digital media usages, Korean people have formed their own culture in terms of politics as well as social lives by experiencing political and social changes continuously under digital technology development.

Statistics clearly have shown that Korean society is already a country where digital technology is widely embedded in people's daily lives. According to the statistical data from Korea Internet and Security Agency [KISA]⁶, Korea's mobile Internet users in the 12 to 59 years old age range account for 80.9 per cent of the total users, and the average time spent using instant messenger is 31 minutes per day and the rate of its usage reached 99.1 per cent in 2015. Based on this figure, it can be regarded that almost all people in Korea use mobile instant messengers. As of 2016, the rate of computer ownership per household was 75.3 per cent, and the rate of smart devices per household reached 88.5 per cent. The data show that 43,646 thousand of the total populations around 51,778 thousand as of December 2017 use the Internet, and its rate is 88.3 per cent of the population aged over three years.

During the last fifteen years, the progress of mobile digital devices and platforms has dramatically improved, and the ubiquitous mobility of the Internet drastically evolved, which is increasingly global in scale. As Koreans' usages of the newer digital platforms such as SNSs and mobile instant messengers are prevalent across the world more and more, the characteristics and role of the media in the society are also increasingly in transition. In this context, the importance of the digital media communication has been continuously growing, not only as a channel for the

⁶ https://www.kisa.or.kr/eng/usefulreport/surveyReport_List.jsp

communication of information but also as a mechanism of the organisation as well as a tool for collective action in the creation of news.

Meanwhile, many observers consider that the Korean government strategically targeted the objectives and planned for the digital-mediated government and society. Regarding this, Oh and Larson (2011) argue that the contributing factors behind Korea's digital development are not only a large amount of investment in establishing the infrastructure of digital-mediated society but also government leadership and its policies. According to Chung (2015), it is not an accident that Korea became a leading country in digital technologies. "It is no coincidence that the period of most intensive investment in ICTs infrastructure corresponded with recovery from the worst effects of the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s" (ibid: 107).

The Korean government has continuously strived to enhance the governmental administration system by introducing ICTs. Due to the government's efforts, Korea's e-government sustained services are acknowledged among the best practices by the other nations. Korea is ranked first in the world for e-government initiatives by a United Nations e-government survey (United Nations [UN] Public Administration Country Studies 2014⁷). It scored governments on their overall digital efforts as well as a specific analysis of digital public service delivery; digital participation; collaborative governance; mobile delivery; digital inclusion; and open government data. Korea retained the top spot in the rankings, having won the position in 2010, 2012 and again in 2014 (Cho 2016).

Although its ranks for e-government and e-participation in the 2016 UN survey⁸ have dropped to third and fourth respectively, Korea remains in the top five and e-participation of Koreans regained the top again in 2018. Regarding this, Korea's high

⁷ <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/reports/un-e-government-survey-2014>

⁸ <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/reports/un-e-government-survey-2016>

reputation in terms of digital governance seems to prove that the Korean government has reached its objective to become more interactive and to provide the public with opportunities to share political opinions (**Figure 2**). Regarding this, many observers consider that politics has become increasingly digitally mediated. They also claim that the digital networking system is regarded to create a more open and fluid environment (see, Perloff 2013), in which people are engaged politically.

Figure 2. Korea's e-government and e-participation ranking changes

	Korea's e-government / e-participation development index ranking by year									
	2001	2003	2004	2005	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
E-government	15	13	5	5	6	1	1	1	3	3
E-participation	-	16	6	4	2	1	1	2	4	1

Source: United Nations [UN] Public Administration Country Studies (2019)

Considering Korea's advanced digital environment and its extension to the political realm, it is expected that the case study of Korea can offer an opportunity to assess the role of digital communication in democratisation in an environment that is widely regarded by scholars as a considerably and rapidly developed digital society. Furthermore, the choice of the Korean case is expected to generate the opportunity to conduct empirical research to investigate what has historically happened and is presently happening; whether there have been any government's efforts to approach democracy by adopting digital communication with ordinary people; how the society has evolved as it became digitally networked and what challenges were discovered in the changing political culture to the Korean democratisation process.

1.6. Outline of the thesis

This research is divided into eight chapters. The chapters include theoretical discussion and empirical analysis.

Chapter 1 introduces the research background and hypotheses, research objectives and questions, case introduction and the outlines of the study. It gives a summary of the research design, presents hypotheses, summarises research questions, and explains how the whole chapters of the research fit into the whole thesis.

Chapter 2 describes the whole research processes, in general, encompassing from preliminary investigation to data analysis. It presents the research methods and justifies the selection of case study methods for the present study. More specifically, it provides research strategies by clarifying ‘case study’ and specific research method techniques that are used for this research project: document analysis, web contents analysis, and interviews.

Chapter 3 discusses, with a broad perspective, the theoretical approaches of the research, explaining the main concepts of this thesis: political communication in the digital age and digital media and democracy. This chapter clarifies the classical ideas of democracies and democratic values that have been universally regarded even before the digital age. Based on this, it suggests an interpretation of the relationship between digital communication and democracy in the digital age. Consequently, these theoretical discussions in terms of democracy in a digital society are applied to the explanation of the Korean case.

In Chapter 4, by introducing Korean specificities in various aspects, basic knowledge of the research case will be provided. To understand the background of Korea’s digital development, this chapter analyses the driving factors of Korea’s digital development. By analysing the interrelationships among politics, economy, and

democracy in Korea in the historical context, it ultimately explains these social factors have influenced the establishment of the present digital society from an integrated point of view. Furthermore, it also concerns a discussion of societal changes, including digital technology development and its democratisation process based on the Korean regime changes. In this context, it discusses overall societal changes, including digital technology development and its democratisation process.

Chapter 5 examines the governmental communications focusing on establishing the infrastructure of the digital-mediated Korean society and the Korean government's digital media adoption. It specifically investigates the background of Korea's digital development, including the establishment of digital infrastructure and government policy initiatives. Also, it identifies governing digital instruments that have used for communication with the public, examines the developmental process of the government's digital media uses and discusses the democratic implication of the government's digital use which is used as both administrative and communication tools.

Chapter 6 scrutinises how digital communications of the Korean government have been operated, how the government has taken advantage of it politically, and how the government's digital communication has affected overall democracy in Korea. More specifically, it analyses the Korean government's digital communication features and its developmental process since 1993 based on the regime changes. It also comparatively investigates each government's attitude towards digital media communication in the society by categorisations of two different conservative and progressive regimes and identifies their influences on democracy.

In terms of political communications of civil society through digital media in present Korean society, Chapter 7 pays attention to the publics' political actions based on the digital platforms from their freedom of expression to the formation of public

spheres and political mobilisation. This chapter observes overall social changes resulted from the publics' extensive use of digital platforms and the government's responses, especially at the political level. By analysing major political issues that have happened in Korea to the present in terms of digital political communication between the government and the public by each regime, it investigates the changes in the relationship between the government and the public in the digital age. By doing so, it analyses transformed civic power in Korean society through digital communications and ultimately identifies the transformation of Korean democracy.

Lastly, Chapter 8 provides the procedure of the research and summarises the main research findings. It also deliberates the research contribution to existing knowledge and issues for further research. Finally, the chapter ends by discussing the limitations of the current research and giving a conclusion.

Chapter 2. Research methodology

2.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to explain in detail the research methods applied to this study. The research methods used in this study are both quantitative and qualitative ones in a broad sense, and this research adopted a case study. For the preliminary investigation, the author conducted documentary analysis and web monitoring. This led to a comprehensive understanding of historical changes in Korea as an advanced digital society and the present digital communication. Considering the data obtained from the preliminary investigation, the author carried out interviews, as the primary research method of this research, with academics and experts in Think-Tanks in Korea and former and present civil servants for more in-depth analysis. Documentary research, web analysis and interviews are considered here as complementary tools, to be used simultaneously, and not strictly sequentially. Overall, this chapter describes explicitly the research methods employed to collect empirical data to solve the research questions of this thesis.

2.2. Research plan

This section defines the scope and character of this research and explains the research strategies applied to the present study. Furthermore, it justifies the research strategies by clarifying why the author adopts a single case study method and selects Korea as a case to solve the research questions.

2.2.1. Research strategy

The empirical analysis is concerned with developing and using a common language and set of methods to describe and explain politics (Manheim et al. 2012: 4). While normative research addresses questions about 'what should or ought to be', empirical analysis encompasses events that occur in societies and political phenomena in the actual world focusing on questions about 'what is' (Halperin & Heath 2016: 4). The empirical research can be 'a means of testing theories and hypotheses by applying certain rules of analysis to the observation and interpretation of political phenomena under strictly delineated circumstances' (Manheim et al. 2012: 5). In this vein, the present study can be considered as an empirical study in that it is based on the observation of what happened in a specific society.

Considering social principles such as public participation, the United Nations [UN] particularly suggests that a qualitative assessment can be useful for demonstrating differences and approaches strategically, in revealing objective or quantitative results (the United Nations [UN] 2003: 110⁹; 2004: 166¹⁰; Lee 2006a: 67). The adoption of a qualitative approach could reflect the significance of such focal issues as the development, context and impact of the subject under review upon people (Lee 2006a: 66-7). Moreover, interdisciplinary studies are regarded to be useful to explain multifaceted social issues beyond the capability of a single discipline to understand comprehensively or resolve effectively. Considering this, both quantitative and qualitative methods were complementarily applied in this research.

⁹ <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan016066.pdf> (20 January 2003)

¹⁰ <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan019207.pdf> (1 August 2005)

2.2.2. Case study

A case study can be a usual research strategy to understand social changes that are continuously evolving, and at the same time, it can be regarded as an appropriate means for the current empirical research where its aim is to study contemporary situations. In particular, the case study with its exploratory features can be a proper way to find out the answer to ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, which are very often considered as forms of research questions of various political studies (Kim 2004: 124-125). Thus, the case study allows scholars not only to scrutinise social phenomena (Lee 1989; Gummesson 1991; Kim 2004: 127-128) but also to appreciate the nature and complexity of processes that unfold over time (Orlikowski 1996; Robey & Boudreau 1999).

“Case study can be the best plan for answering the research questions; in that, it can offer a means of investigating complicated social issues that consist of a variety of variables of potential significance in figuring out the phenomenon.”
(Merriam 2009)

In the meantime, some scholars indicate that qualitative case studies are difficult to use for generalising from one research project to another one since they usually are very dependent on social context and time (see, Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998; Bryman & Burgess 1999). In particular, Hamel (1993: 23) argues that the case study has continuously been questioned about its lack of representativeness, and this lack of rigour is linked to the bias from the subjectivity of the investigator and others who are involved in the case. However, the generalisability of case studies is not determined by random sampling and statistical inference but is derived by gaining an in-depth understanding of the chosen case (Kim 2004: 134-135). Generalisability concerns the

external validity of research findings and whether the data applied to one set of ideas can also apply in other settings (ibid). In this vein, the case studies are often selected and conducted due to either its criticality or uniqueness, but it centres on the selected case at a universal level as well as a single level, and it thus can be ‘holistic’ (Yin 1994; Kim 2004: 124-125).

“In some case studies, an in-depth longitudinal examination of a single case or event is used” (Zainal 2007). A single case study is a case-based research project, usually in considerable depth (Edwards 1998: 1). Every single case can be used to confirm or challenge a theory or to represent a unique or extreme case (Yin 1994). However, since the research setting of a case cannot be controlled, researchers have to use evidence from different points of views and time perspectives. Meanwhile, among diverse types of case studies, intensive case studies (Selznick 1949; Dalton 1959, 2017) help researchers develop an understanding of real settings and search for a range of explanations or interpretations (Cunningham 1997: 403). The goal of the intensive case studies is to provide a history, description, or interpretation of unique and typical experiences or events (ibid). These events become the basis for developing theory from an understanding of the context in which certain events occurred (Dalton 1959; Dyer Jr & Wilkins 1991; Cunningham 1997: 402).

By considering these various methodological advantages of case studies, the author decided to conduct an intensive case study by focusing on a single case, which is one of the representative cases in terms of the thesis topic. Benbasat et al. (1987: 383) particularly emphasise that the case study is very applicable for understanding such interactions between digital-related innovations and the organisational context, which is directly related to the present research. They also state that valuable new insights can be generated to help our understanding of challenges emerging from the rapidly changing

ICT field (ibid). According to them, the case study even permits researchers to generate theories from the digital practice as well as obtain knowledge about it (ibid: 370) (Kim 2004: 127-129). In this vein, an intensive single case study can be regarded as an appropriate research strategy to investigate the topic of the present research and comprehend social phenomena, such as the relationship between digital communication development and democracy.

2.2.3. Justification of the case selection

“Case selection must be determined by the research purpose, questions, proposition, and theoretical context” (Rowley 2002: 19). Given that, the rationale behind having Korea as a case in order to examine the relationship between digital technology and democracy was as follows. Firstly, Korea is a representative case that is one of the best-developed countries in terms of digital technology and rapidly achieved economic growth and democratisation. There are still many Asian countries that have not reached the same level of development at the various economic, political, and technological aspects such as Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines. Therefore, although economic growth does not guarantee stronger democracy, the study of the representative case that has achieved a higher level of development in various aspects can provide other Asian developing countries with empirical knowledge about how a country has developed itself through digital technology development.

Secondly, Korea is a country where regime changes have taken place between conservative and progressive parties during the last twenty-five years since 1993. In the digital age, there has been much research on election campaigns and political publicity through digital media, but research on the regime-specific digital media use of different political forces, focusing on communicating with the public, has been lacking. In this

regard, the Korean case study can be useful to comparatively identify the differentiated digital media use of the political forces that have different political ideologies that considerably affect democracy. Given the fact that different political points of views based on conservative and progressive ideologies exist in all countries, albeit a different power balance of political forces, the Korean case study will contribute to providing more concrete and critical perspectives in understanding the political use of digital media of the different regimes in a democratic country.

Thirdly, Korea has experienced unique and extreme political transformations, which are directly related to democracy in the modern digital age. Koreans have consistently shown political collective actions with digital networking playing a major role in their collective actions (Kim & Kim 2009; Cho et al. 2012; Kim 2015). Recently, these democratic actions of the ordinary people in Korea led to the presidential impeachment due to the political corruption scandal in 2016, which was not a usual phenomenon even in world politics. In this context, Korea can be regarded as a representative country in the world, which has experienced dramatic political achievement in terms of democracy in the digital age. In this vein, the Korean case study may fill an academic gap in terms of modern civil mobilisation through digital communications in civil society.

Consequently, considering the fact that Korea is one of the most developed digital countries and the democratisation processes that Koreans have experienced, the Korean case study in examining the relationship between digital development and democracy can be particularly useful for the other Asian developing countries at the early stage of digital development as well as democratisation. In this vein, this Korean case study can propose that other democratic countries in the contemporary digital era

think about how digital communication technologies have to be used for establishing a better democratic society.

2.3. Preliminary investigations

Overall, research procedures that are used for the present thesis are divided into two different stages: preliminary investigation and fieldwork based on the preliminary examination. For the preliminary investigation, documentary analysis and web analysis were conducted. Then, for the main research implementation, in-depth interviews with previous and present civil servants, academics and professionals were conducted. Before carrying out fieldwork, to clarify the direction and range of research, the author implemented preliminary investigations such as the government's documentary analysis, web contents analysis, and exploring national research council archives. Also, the author reviewed some academic and grey literature about the history of political communication. In parallel, the author studied the characteristics of digital communication strategies of the seventeen ministries in order to select the most instructive and manageable samples to focus.

As preliminary investigations, web monitoring was conducted over a year and a half from January 2016, all along with spotting and exploring more in-depth windows of more intense and insightful sequences. Through these sequences, the author examined governmental organisations' attitudes and actions in terms of communication with the people within their overall political context. In this regard, the design of interview questions for fieldwork was based on these prior investigations, and the explorations of the governmental institutions also helped to set a proper frame of interview questions to be made. More obviously, the investigations provided basic,

significant ideas about the interviews with both present and previous government officials who were and are in communication departments in selected institutions.

2.3.1. Analysis of documentary sources

Official documents encompass various government documents, policies and projects that were created over a long period and reflected a trend in society. Thus, it can be helpful for researchers to analyse historical changes or developmental processes. In fact, “The ‘past’ is never really ‘past’ but continuously constitutive of the ‘present’” (Bryant 1994: 11). Therefore, “In order to explain the structures of contemporary societies, one must investigate their historical origins and development” (Deflem & Dove 2013: 561; Halperin & Heath 2016: 239). Researchers in the political science field are identifying that temporality in terms of context and timing matters significantly to the ability to clarify political phenomena. Furthermore, historical approaches can help political researchers to ‘place politics in time (Pierson 2004)’ (Halperin & Heath 2016: 240). Based on these arguments, for the historical analysis of this research, this study focused on the literature that specifically shows the changes of the governmental communication from 1993 to the current regime in a media environment situation that keeps evolving.

In this research, in order to understand Korean political communications and its political histories, diverse documentation was analysed; Korean governmental organisations’ archives, press releases, publications that the governmental institutions published and studies from other previous researchers. A series of documentary analysis was considerably employed in discussing historical changes in digital government development and governmental communication initiatives. For example, in order to understand why and how the Korean government has invested so massively in

establishing the digital society, academic sources such as published books and peer-reviewed journals were a source of supporting data for the literature review. In addition to this, the analysis of official government's documents was useful for understanding not only the changes in new government's communication comprehensively but also understanding Korean democratisation through the government's digital interactions with the public.

2.3.2. Web analysis

In an attempt to understand what the government communicates with the public, web analysis was conducted (Cho 2016). Regarding this, Weber (1990) defines content analysis as a useful research technique to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional or social attention. Web content analysis can be utilised in the social sciences on the subject of communication content. It is also defined as any research technique for the 'objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of digital communications (Berelson 1952: 74)' (Lee 2006a: 70-71).

As the topic of the present research is fundamentally related to 'digital-mediated communication', the author analysed contents on digital platforms the governmental organisations are operating, such as official webpages, SNS channels, and mobile messenger pages. In addition to this, the author investigated digital documents and official web pages that specific ministries that are responsible for the Korean governmental communication (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism [MCST]) and digital government (Ministry of Interior and Safety [MOIS]) are running. By doing so, the author systematically could track changes in Korean governmental communication with the public through digital media and its related policies.

To understand aspects of the Korean governmental digital media communications with ordinary people, months-long monitoring of digital platforms that the governmental organisations run was carried out. The web monitoring was focusing on, and 17 ministries considered vital building blocks for official governmental websites such as the kinds of digital platforms they use, the contents they intend to provide, or the kinds of strategies they implement. More specifically, by examining the governmental organisations' digital channel operations, the author also identified if governmental digital platforms open real forums, and if so, what kind of communication develops there. As a result, the author could make a table based on monitoring governmental organisations' digital channels (see, **Appendix1**).

This preliminary web analysis provided the author with essential knowledge about the Korean government's digital communication operation. It was used to assess the nature of the relationship between the governmental organisations and the public by measuring the opportunities for dialogues (Taylor et al. 2001), conflicts, cooperation and actual contents on the digital platforms. Also, the analysis of the web components on the main webpages and SNS channels has reflected the selection of a sample of governmental ministries. The data obtained from the web investigation were reflected by the questions in the interviews with the present civil servants in the communication departments of each selected ministry.

2.4. Fieldwork

Fieldwork based on the results of preliminary investigations proceeded from 27 July 2017 to 30 September 2017. In the current research, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted based on snowball sampling and semi-structured interview techniques. More details of the adopted methodological tactics of this research are below.

2.4.1. Categories of interview

“Interviewing is extensively used to supplement and extend a range of knowledge about individual thoughts, behaviours and specialised role relations” (Fontana & Frey 2000). Interviewing, as a means of social science research, does not aim to make generalisations, but to obtain valid knowledge and understanding about what the person in question thinks and to gain a depth of knowledge (Halperin & Heath 2016: 286). Mainly, exploratory interviews are useful for obtaining personal experiences (Lee 2006a: 72). Thus, in this study, in order to solve research questions of nature, the author adopted the interview technique. A more detailed explanation of the interview technique used in this study is as follows.

2.4.1.1. Semi-structured interview

Interviewing can be categorised according to the level of structure (Kim 2004: 147). Regarding this, three different types of interview techniques can be distinguished: a structured interview, a semi-structured interview, and an unstructured interview (Robson 1993). The features of the differently categorised interviews are shown in **Figure 3** (Park 2013).

Figure 3. Types of interview

Type of interview	Features	Material used
Structured interview	It uses an interview schedule that typically comprises a list of carefully worded and ordered questions. Each interviewee is asked exactly the same questions in exactly the same order	Interview schedule
Semi-structured interview	It uses an interview guide. The interview is organised through ordered but flexible questions.	Interview guide, (sometimes an interview schedule)
Unstructured interview	The questions are determined by the interviewee's response.	Interview guide

Source: Park (2013: 73) modified from Dunn (2000: 102) and Bryman (2004: 113)

Among these three different types of interviews, the current research adopted a semi-structured interview for the following reasons. “Semi-structured interview questions are practical for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (Louise & While 1994: 330). Regarding the semi-structured interview, Valentine (1997: 111) argues, “The aim of a semi-structured interview is not to be representative, but to understand how individual people experience and make sense of their own lives.” In this regard, as the aim of the research is on the latter, it can be regarded as an appropriate method for resolving the research questions on this empirical study. Considering this, Halperin and Heath (2016) more precisely explain the semi-structured interview below,

“Semi-structured interview is the best data-collection type for open-ended questions and in-depth exploration of opinions. The interviewer works directly with the respondent and has the opportunity to probe or ask follow-up questions. By being able to ask questions of subjects personally, the interviewer can probe unclear responses, resolve difficulties that lead to non-responses, and obtain useful information from body language and vocal cues. In sum, this type of interviewing can support longer, and more detailed questions are adaptable, and is a rich and dense course of data.” (Halperin & Heath 2016: 286)

By taking these advantages of the semi-structured interview technique, the author intended to conduct interviews under flexible interview conditions. In interviews for this research project, selected interviewees who have had knowledge about or experience with digital governmental communication were interviewed in a semi-structured style. In the meantime, the interviews conducted in this research can be

regarded as intensive face-to-face interviewing. It can encompass in-depth, face-to-face and one-on-one conversation with interviewees as a principal instrument of qualitative research to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena. Face-to-face interviews are a primary source of data but are used to supplement the methods described above.

2.4.1.2. Elite interviews

Some specific research questions in political science can only be answered if specific individuals provide their thoughts. In this case, researchers often decide to conduct interviews with specific individuals who have much knowledge about certain topics and careers and high social status and reputations, which is so-called ‘elite interviewing’. The elites are people who can provide knowledge to a given research project (Manheim et al. 2012: 301). The status of elites depends not on their social role but on their accessibility to information that can help answer given research inquiries. From researchers’ perspectives, elites can be regarded as a means of gaining in-depth knowledge of a particular phenomenon as well as discovering new aspects of that phenomenon that researchers did not anticipate. Gathered information from the elites is likely to be the unique knowledge that can often be a valuable supplement to studies. Thus, elite interviewing needs to be implemented in a manner appropriate to individual interviewees and situations (Manheim et al. 2012: 303).

However, conducting elite interviews in research inevitably involves some risks: “elites might (1) have so narrow a view of the events in question that they do not understand which aspects are important when explaining them; (2) have inaccurate information (either because they misperceived events in the first place or because they have forgotten important elements); (3) have convinced themselves, in order to

rationalise their own actions, that things are one way when they are actually another; or (4) intentionally lie in order to protect themselves or others” (Manheim et al. 2012: 302).

Despite these impediments, it still offers pivotal advantages to social scientists. Through conducting interviews with some elites, researchers have access to information closely and directly related to the answer to given research questions and obtain a crucial source about political events. In particular, it seems appropriate to carry out elite interviewing to solve the research questions in that information and knowledge about the topic of the research is exclusive to some minorities of elites. In this vein, intensive specialised interviewing with elite respondents involving in-depth, one-on-one conversations can be a primary instrument of qualitative research. Meanwhile, although the first purpose of the elite interviewing is to obtain new information, another essential purpose is to ‘confirm the accuracy of the information that has previously been collected from other sources’ (Halperin & Heath 2016: 298).

Regarding this, Hakim (1982: 1) indicates that official data may be defined as ‘further analysis of an existing data set which presents interpretation and conclusion of knowledge additional to, or different from, those presented in the first report on the inquiry as a whole and its main results’. In this sense, elite interviewing in this research was also used as a means of confirming some data that the author gathered beforehand from books, official documents, and publications.

2.4.2. Selection of interviewees

In order to select interviewees in this research project, the author adopted the snowball-sampling technique. The snowball sampling is a useful research technique to access hard-to-reach samples. Since most interview candidates were regarded as elites, accessibility was very poor from a researcher’s perspective. Furthermore, the fact that

the targeted interviewees have personal relationships by themselves because they have common ground, such as status as civil servants or experts in the relevant field, favourably worked. Therefore, in this context, snowball sampling acted as an appropriate tool rather than other methods in this research (see, **Appendix 2**).

In interviews for this research project, selected interviewees who have had knowledge about or experience with digital governmental communication were interviewed in a semi-structured style. The range of interviewees was needed to cover the different people who can provide proper, professional information and knowledge in terms of the transformational social phenomena. Thus, interviewing was more focused on finding detailed and specialised information from a single individual or a small number of individuals who have fruitful knowledge and experience about the history and present situation of Korean political communications through digital media. Some researchers (see, Halperin & Heath 2016: 300-301) differentiate elite interviews from expert interviews. However, in this research, all the interviewees are regarded as elites in that they provided knowledge relating to the research topic based on their professional working experience and research career.

All participants for this research project either have worked and been working for the Korean governmental communications, public relations, and digital government, or have much knowledge about relevant fields from the prior period to the present situation. The interviewees were composed of not only senior civil servants with more than twenty years of work experience but also junior civil servants who are currently in charge of digital communications with the public. This composition of interviewees was to seek to gain data that covered both the historical developmental process and the present situation. Based on their professionalism in practices and theories, they could provide quality information as can be perceived from a professional point of view.

However, since targeted respondents who could provide related information were limited, the range of targeted interviewees in this research was not so broad.

The groups of interviewees are divided into four: former and present civil servants, experts, and an external expert. The interviews were drawn from a sample of a total of 23 interviewees in different positions and fields, including an email interview with a civil servant who was studying abroad. These were 15 previous and present civil servants working in governmental organisations in Korea: (1) Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism [MCST], (2) Ministry of Interior and Safety [MOIS], (3) Ministry of Science and ICTs [MSIT], (4) Ministry of Strategy and Finance [MOSF], (5) Ministry of Education [MOE], (6) Seoul City Hall (local government). As civil servants have to maintain political neutrality due to their position, some civil servants, whose interviews revealed political bias, asked for anonymity during the interviews.

There are valid reasons why the author selected these organisations, respectively, as samples for the research. (1) MCST is an institution that is the successor of the Government Information Agency [GIA]. It has officially been acting as a representative organisation for online governmental communications and public relations even though the function was reduced. Although all the ministries have their communication departments for public relations, MCST is still considered an important institution because it acts as a coordinator for all the ministries' public relations though it has lost much of its former national publicity function. In particular, the in-depth interviews with the previous civil servants who worked at the GIA in the past were intentionally conducted to cover the period of study. Among them, one is still working as a senior civil servant in the MCST. (2) MOIS has been working for the digitalisation of each ministry's working systems. It has played a vital role in digital governmental information, internal administrative affairs, and public services that used to be regarded

as manual tasks. (3) MSIT has been in charge of the establishment and advancement of ICTs infrastructure and promotion of national information policy and business. It also oversees the national information and communication technology.

To investigate the present governmental communication through digital media, civil servants in online communication departments in (4) MOSF and (5) MOE, as well as ones in the ministries mentioned above, were included as interview candidates. Apart from the result of ministries' web monitoring data as a preliminary investigation, according to the data in terms of central administrative organisations' digital media communication value conducted by the Korea Internet Communication Association [KICOA]¹¹ from 15 March to 15 June 2017, MOSF and MOE were ranked high among 17 ministries. It is based on the idea that it would be more meaningful for the research project to investigate cases where digital communication is relatively evaluated, as its objective is to provide implication as an advanced case. In addition to this, (6) Seoul City Hall was also included in the investigation because it has been evaluated as a representative local government that actively operates digital communication with the public.

When it comes to experts' interviews, present senior researchers from the three different national research institutions in Korea, called Think-Tanks: (7) Korea Legislation Research Institute [KLRI], (8) Korea Information Society Development Institute [KISDI], and (9) Science and Technology Policy Institute [STEPI], were interviewed. Besides, some selected academics in Korea who are familiar with Korean political communication and public relations, and digital governance were included in the interviews. They officially belonged to Universities in Korea, but they also have work experience as civil servants and advisors for governmental affairs. In addition to

¹¹ Korea Internet Communication Association [KICOA]. (2017). "The central administrative organisations' digital media communication value"
<http://socialconchip.com/?p=6235>

this, they have experience in publishing journals or books on related topics. Additionally, through an interview with the CEO of the well-known private Public Relations agency in Korea, the author could also gain valuable ideas based on an external perspective.

Ultimately, the selected governmental organisations are directly related to the research topic. In this sense, it can be the right assumption that civil servants related to these governmental organisations were expected to provide the related information encompassing the range of this research from historical changes to the present situation. Also, conducting interviews with present and previous governmental officials could be an essential complement to what this research will discover through archives and online observations. The reason why the author conducted interviews with academics and experts, rather than catch ideas from publications, is mainly because the interviewing technique is much more effective at gaining recent information to examine the present society. Furthermore, considering the continuous updating social contexts, it can be a more useful research tool to obtain further and more in-depth information beyond the information in publications from the interviewees, mainly when researchers deal with social norms such as democracy.

2.4.3. Collecting data

With the study objectives in mind, the first step was to identify targeted interviewees and make a list of them. To contact present civil servants, the author tried to find their contact details such as an email or phone number through the main webpages of the governmental organisations where they were working. However, the author could only gain an official contact number. The author tried to contact them individually by directly calling them. However, it was very difficult to get in contact

without the personal network as while some wanted to help to provide related information, others avoided contacting her. Nevertheless, based on the first version of the list of interviewees, the author began to conduct interviews, and after the interviews, the author personally asked the interviewees to introduce other targeted interviewees using their business network.

The first wave of interviews, like pilot interviews, was conducted on 27 July 2017 with two present civil servants in MOIS: a senior civil servant in a department in charge of e-government in Korea and a junior civil servant in the communication department. Based on the interviews, research questions for interviews with civil servants were complemented and customised. The second wave of interviews was performed mainly in September 2017. It encompassed all the interviewees except for the civil servants who already participated in former interviews. The time each in-depth interview lasted varied; however, the average interview time is over one hour. Among all the governmental officer interviewees, there was one who participated in this research only through a written version of the interview electronically because he/she was studying abroad at that time.

Interview questions were asked partially differently to each interviewee by social roles and backgrounds of the interviewees. However, questions in terms of assessing the relationship between digital communication development and democracy in Korea were commonly asked all the interviewees. Before having interviews, the participants were only provided with a general explanation of the interviews such as ‘what was it about’ without giving specific interview questions, which was to reduce respondents’ bias. Because the interview consisted of open-ended questions, during conducting each interview the answers provided by the interviewees could be

developed more in-depth by additional supplementary questions (see, **Appendix 3, 4, 5,** and **6**).

2.5. Data analysis

Transcription of the recorded interviews took place after the completion of all the interviews. Digitally recorded voice files were translated from Korean to English and transcribed in the form of MS-Word documents. The interview data were grouped by the interviewee's background first and re-sorted by research themes and specific questions. In order to confirm if the interview data were right or not, analyse of interview data based on facts was proceeded, in parallel, analysis of additional supplementary data, such as newspaper articles at that time and official publications, conducted at the same time. It was to validate the accuracy of the research findings. Also, reflecting on the fieldwork notes the researcher wrote during the interviews, the interview data analysis was implemented. Comparing this to the data from the preliminary investigations, the researcher separately sorted out common shared and specific information.

2.6. Conclusion

In this methodology chapter, research methods applied to this study and the overall research process were explained in detail. First of all, the background knowledge from the preliminary research data gained from document analysis and web analysis was beneficial to enhance the researcher's understanding of selected cases and create appropriate interview questions. In addition to this, the preliminary research data

helped the researcher to ask additional questions relating to the research topic fitting each interviewee during the conducting of the interviews.

The interviews were conducted during three-month-long fieldworks in Korea from 27 July 2017 to 30 September 2017. Interviewing data were mostly collected from face-to-face interviews with civil servants and experts. Through the elite interviews with former and present civil servants as well as external experts, including senior researchers in Korean Think-tanks, the author sought to collect specialised knowledge based on their personal research and work experiences. The interviewees provided their practical and academic knowledge not only about historical, political and social changes of Korea but also the level of democracy in Korean society by the development of digital society. Therefore, the researcher could obtain a broad range of knowledge and their personal opinions relating to the research topic by having interviews with the people in different fields from practical to academic.

Chapter 3. Theoreies of digital media and democracy

3.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews theoretical approaches to political communications in the present digital era. It mainly discusses the role of digital communications of both government and society in underpinning the quality and functioning of democracy. Firstly, it describes the overall changes in the media communication environment during recent decades, including the emergence of SNSs. Secondly, it discusses the nature of political communications and the political implications of digital media communication. It explains how the political communication paradigm at a governmental level has transformed since before the emergence of the digital era. Thirdly, it theoretically approaches to the political participation of the people in a digital society, from the formation of the public sphere and collective actions on digital spaces. Lastly, it clarifies different concepts of democracy by comparing varying ideas and suggests criteria to analyse democratic society by examining specific democratic values in terms of digital communications.

3.2. The emergence of the digital media era

Since the late 2000s, as digital communication channels became diversified, not only young people but also the older generations have adopted digital channels as main communication tools. Due to digital media development, so many people in the world communicate through digital media with others regardless of gender, age and nationality. Now, it can be regarded that digital communications became a quite universal social phenomenon. More importantly, the presence of digital media

communication has led to enormous changes in both societal and political realms. Digital communication is regarded as a crucial societal factor in explaining the present digital era. In this regard, this section observes how the media communication environment has changed in detail.

3.2.1. Digital media as political communication tools

One of the most significant roles of the media, ranging from traditional media to digital media, is to form politics and society. In the traditional media era, communication themes have been brought to attention, analysed, and proposed to the political system through mass media. However, during the last few decades, the political communication environment has rapidly changed due to the emergence of digital media. Digital media have undermined some traditional media-era assumptions encompassing broadcasting, radio, and newspapers. Thus, the social impacts of previous mass media, so-called off-line news media, which are the dominant sources of information for most, are becoming relatively less important (Davis 2010). While traditional media had a unidirectional and hierarchical structure in which the state could monopolise the production of content, digital media have challenged this by having the people act as both consumers and producers of content (Abbott 2012: 335; Anduiza et al. 2012).

Besides, Jorba and Bimber (2012) argue that the notable feature of digital media is enabling ‘the direct, fast expressions and reactions’ (Anduiza et al. 2012: 23). The digital media act as primary deliverers in a society beyond the level of face-to-face settings, and enables people to share information, conduct analyses, hold forums for debate, and share democratic culture, which is already beyond dispute (Dahlgren 2009: 2-3). With widespread access to digital-mediated platforms, the ability of the people to

solicit and share opinions and ideas across various topics has undergone a dramatic change with the rise of digital media including SNSs (Agrawal et al. 2011; Stieglitz & Linh 2013).

It can be considered that new advancement in digital technology has resulted in not only a breakthrough in media trends but also a shift in all-around communication patterns. Digital media do not require that one should belong to a particular institution (Hauben & Markoff 2005). Today, people can use digital media almost everywhere and communicate with anyone through electronic gadgets such as smartphones, laptops and tablet PCs (Qvortrup 2007: 68). They can adopt digital media as their main communicational channels due to various advantages of using digital platforms such as easier accessibility and efficiency. Due to the emergence of digital media in contemporary society, people can electronically engage with others more often and in diverse ways (Perloff 2013).

More importantly, diverse digital media channels have been regarded as new political communication tools for both governments and the public in the political realm. In particular, the members of modern democratic countries, including not only political leaders but also ordinary people, tend to use digital media as tools for political interactions. On the one hand, through these digital networking platforms, the government not only can collect public opinions but also can collaborate with civil intelligence in operating governance. On the other hand, ordinary people can express their opinions freely and easily and have more opportunities to participate in political sharing and debates more often through digital media. They no longer need a specific space to interact with others, receive diverse information and express their opinions about political and social issues.

3.2.2. The emergence of Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

During the last couple of decades, various social media have emerged, and people have been using them across the world. SNSs are integrated platforms that combine media and information and communication technologies, which roughly encompass webpages, webmail, digital image, digital video, discussion group, guest book, connection list, or search engine (Fuchs 2013). More specifically, SNSs include Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, and Wikis, and media sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr. The very word ‘social’ associated with media may imply that digital platforms are user-centred and that they facilitate communal activities, as the term ‘participatory’ emphasises human collaboration (Van Dijck 2013: 11). Regarding this, Shirky (2011) defines SNSs as communication tools that can increase our ability to share and co-operate, with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutional institutions and organisations.

There have been diverse definitions of SNSs on a variety of outcomes by researchers in different fields. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define SNSs as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.’ According to technical explanations by Boyd and Ellison (2007), SNSs are defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.” Based on these features, they appear in public discourse by emphasising relationship initiation, which enables people to articulate and make visible their social networks (Boyd & Ellison 2007: 211).

In this sense, SNSs can be regarded as digital facilitators or enhancers of human networks, webs of people that promote connectedness as a social value and participatory digital platforms that can create and spread information in a collaborative manner (Creighton 2005). Social connections built on SNS channels allow people to be directly accessible at all times and locations, leading to decentralised and asynchronous communication (Hermanns 2008: 75-76). Regarding this, Fuchs (2013) argues that the technological structure of the social media enables and constrains human behaviour and is produced and continuously reproduced by the human communicative part of the Internet whose technological system has a networked character. Also, Bertot et al. (2010) emphasise SNSs' potential to make people freely form communities and participate in interactions, by putting four strengths: collaboration, participation, empowerment, and time. According to Bertot et al.'s comments, SNSs, as communication tools, can have advantages in enhancing public participation in political and social realms (ibid). His statement is below,

“Social media (SNSs) is collaborative and participatory by its very nature, as it is defined by social interaction. It provides the ability for users to connect with each [other] and form communities to socialise, share information, or to achieve a common goal or interest. Social media can be empowering to its users as it gives them a platform to speak. It allows anyone with access to the Internet the ability to inexpensively publish or broadcast information, effectively institutional media.” (Bertot et al. 2010: 266)

Compared to the traditional media era, governments and public in the digital age can communicate with each other through diverse digital media more often including SNSs, which have the potential to enhance collaboration among members of society.

Due to the communicative features of the SNS channels, people have commenced using communicational tools for their daily lives, and naturally, the governments of many countries tried to communicate with their citizens by adopting these new types of digital platforms. Given that, it can be assumed that people in the digital era tend to be more motivated by social and communicative needs and desires to use social media when they communicate with one another.

However, despite many studies on the prevalent use of digital communication tools in various societies, studies about the potential democratic implications that these new types of digital media platforms have, by reflecting the contemporary societies' chronological features and locally political situations, are still lacking.

3.3. Governmental communication changes in the digital age

Through the preceding section, it was identified that the digital-mediated political systems had become a widely accepted phenomenon due to media environment changes. It has led to considerable changes in the political communication environment around the world. In particular, the prominence of new media is impacting on the process of governance and political culture in present societies. Considering this, this section analyses political communication paradigm changes and governments' digital media. To do this, it approaches a more detailed theoretical rationale about the democratic implication of digital media communications focusing on the political aspect by discussing existing scholars' arguments.

3.3.1. Transformation of political communication paradigm

The process of politics fundamentally consists of leaders and followers, and it implies the authority of leaders and the acceptance by the followers (Helgesen 2014: 9).

Political communication research has conventionally focused on ‘the communicative interaction between the formal actors within the political communication system: political institutions/actors, the media and citizens’ (Dahlgren 2009: 4). Among various types of political actions, communication between the leaders and followers has been one of the crucial issues in the political science field. Turning to the digital age, digitalisation led to a new communication paradigm by enabling people to express their opinions through diverse digital channels. The process of political communication has been becoming more diverse, fragmented and complex, as new types of media emerge. In this vein, the academic focus on the political communication field has tended to move from the previous traditional political communication to the political transformation through digital media.

Many observers in different fields argue that significant changes in not only society but also in the media may be giving birth to a new type of political communication system which is qualitatively different from its previous versions (Cook 1998; Norris et al. 1999; Blumler & Kavanagh 1999). In fact, in the traditional media era, diverse issues tended not to be discussed by ordinary people but by elites, such as politicians, journalists, experts and interest group leaders for reception and consideration by voters (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999: 219). It has been generally seen that some of the mass political parties in democratic countries in the world mainly participated in internal political debates, the ordinary members of the public used to act merely as receivers, followers or listeners. However, today, the public is no longer defined as passive ones when discussing politics and political communication.

Before the digital age, the traditional major media, such as broadcasting, radio, and newspapers, significantly affected the formation of the public’s opinions that had potential to be transformed as influential social forces. Turning to the digital age,

however, the process, ways, and sphere of public opinion formation have changed, and it seems that the social influence of the traditional media power has been noticeably transferred to digital media. Turning to the information age, digital media have tended to replace the role of traditional media (Loader & Mercea 2011). In this context, the emergence of digital media has been transforming how the government and the public communicate (see, the Council for Excellence in Government [CEG] 2000; Strover & Straubhaar 2000).

In this vein, McClure (2000) particularly emphasises that political communication through digital platforms has the potential to help build better relationships between a government and the public by making interaction with citizens smoother, easier, and more efficient. Tedesco (2004: 507) argues that the emergence of digital media considerably transformed the way individuals, organisations, political institutions, and governments communicate and negotiate political information and political roles. Furthermore, Stoker (2006: 202) more ambitiously argues that developed digital communication has profoundly changed public engagement in politics and the relationship between citizens and the political authorities.

Some other scholars such as Friedman (2005) and Tai (2007) more specifically claim that digital media has the potential to transform the political communication structure in societies from hierarchical into more horizontal (Jorba & Bimber 2012; Anduiza et al. 2012: 28). Besides, Loader and Mercea (2011) also maintain, “In contrast to traditional mass media, networked media have the potential to re-configure communicative power relations.” Moreover, Oladepo (2015: 30) claims that it is regarded that political communication through digital media has the potential to change political behaviour and manner, not only of the governors but also of the governed.

In the current digital era, the relationship between the government and civil society should be reconsidered in terms of mutual empowerment in the sense that it has contended for or negotiated power (Ryoo 2009: 23). Regarding this, Castells (2011b: 776) argues that a question of power as traditionally formulated does not make sense in the network society, but new forms of domination and determination are critical in shaping peoples' lives regardless of their will. Regarding this, Veit and Huntgebruth (2013: 31) argue that the government's digital communication has the potential to reorganise the political power back to the governed. Considering these scholars' arguments, it seems that digital media have at least the potential to reconfigure traditional political communication paradigms. Given that, it seems necessary to conduct more in-depth research in terms of contemporary political changes and the relationship between the governors and the governed in the digital media era.

3.3.2. Digital media as governmental communication tools

Turning to the digital age, many democratic countries across the world are adopting digital media for various advantages such as administrative efficiency and economic reasons. The governments take advantage of digital media as new communication channels to connect the public and local governments (Mossberger et al. 2013; Mainka et al. 2015: 239). Moreover, as the digital system penetration rates increase, politicians and political organisations indeed tend to rely more on the media as a means of communication in the modern age (Tedesco 2004: 508). At present, the adoption of digital media by governments across the world could be regarded as an essential condition for many countries that have already entered digital society.

Diverse digital activities of governments in the world are being carried out for various specific advantages. Firstly, governments can enhance administrative efficiency

and save time and cost. Secondly, through digital channels, governments can have more chances to directly persuade the people in order to justify their national affairs. Thirdly, governments can offer digital forums and collective dialogues via blogs or web pages to the public in order for them to express their own opinions and share ideas.

Many observers have expected that the efficiency of digital governmental services could bring considerable changes in the political realm. According to the United Nations [UN] & the American Society for Public Administration [ASPA] (2001), governments' digital media uses can be a permanent commitment by the government to improving the relationship between the citizen and the public sector through enhanced, cost-effective and efficient delivery of services, information and knowledge (Kim & Kim 2003: 361). The efficiency of enhanced digital governmental services was expected by many researchers to bring the administration closer to the public, while interactive communication in political debates brings them closer to the process of democratisation.

In the past, when people could not use digital technology, a crucial role of governmental communication may have been simple (Wring 2005), such as achieving policy goals, building communities, or policing. However, due to the interactive nature of digital media, governments can create a more open and fluid environment by enabling mutual interactions with the public. In particular, compared to the traditional mass media, the most distinguishing feature of the government's digital media communication can be its interactive nature. Having communications through digital media, governments can take actions as both a sender and a receiver. While governments mainly used to act as 'senders' in the traditional media era, it more recently seems that the governments' role as a 'receiver' is becoming more enhanced in

the present digital age as they can quickly receive and collect opinions from the public through digital platforms.

For the state's aspect, digital media can be regarded as a communication means as well as an efficient administrative tool. The governments can provide their people with information about government policies and help them to participate in the decision-making process through digital platforms. Due to digital services provided by the governments, people could have more chances to exert their rights as citizens by participating in politics and national affairs and expressing their voices. In addition, by letting people exchange information and ideas freely, providing them with more chances to participate in the government's decision-making process and interacting with the people directly, the governments can enhance their accountability and transparency. In this sense, Veit and Huntgebruth (2013: 31) argue that digital communication has informational influence and connectivity provides the government with opportunities not only to improve public service but also promote digital democracy.

3.3.3. Democratic implication of governmental digital communication

There have been many arguments about the democratic implications of governmental digital use as communication tools. For Malina (2005), governmental digital media communication have enhanced some specific democratic values. Digital communications' democratic natures can provide the government with logical validity in terms of the government's implementation of digital communications for its interaction with the public:

“Whilst commentators over time have defended the media as a sphere of public debate, our traditional media have been accompanied by notions of top-down,

paternalistic, one-to-many, non-democratic invisibility. Supported by a blend of liberal, communitarian and entrepreneurial philosophies, the emergence of computerised ICTs, has promoted less hierarchical discourses, characterised by the prospect of more intense democratic participation, visible-ness, public-ness, and open-ness.” (Malina 2005: 23)

In this context, Clift (2004: 2-4) emphasises the duties of governments to maintain existing democratic practices and adopt digital technologies in order to enhance democracy. According to Clift’s argument, since participatory governance can lead to better democratic outcomes, governments have to play a proactive role in the digital world as a public institution and guardian of democracy (ibid). Regarding this, Velázquez (2008) claims that digital communication between the government and the people could be an effective method for making both of them satisfied, as its best advantage is the potential ability of citizens to exercise their democratic rights.

More recently, Oladepo (2015: 30) maintains that in the transformational media context digital media communication has the potential to change the political manner of government. Furthermore, Giansante (2015) claims that digital communications of the governments allow much more detailed management of affairs, which is restructuring the political and social sphere. However, despite these advocates’ points of view, there also have been many scholars who have doubtful views on the democratic implications of governmental digital media use as communication tools.

Hindman (2008: 9) claims that governments’ usage of digital platforms for communication with the public may have little or no impact on politics. Freeman and Quirke (2013: 151) also argue that while governmental digital media communication is likely to lead to 'a power shift between citizens and their elected decision-makers', it can rather make the governments reluctant to implement opportunities for public

participation. In this vein, Couldry (2015: 609) argues that the popular argument that political communications based on digital networks bring about political changes (McDonalds 2011), and even enhance democracy can be problematic.

Furthermore, some other scholars also argue that the analyses of whether governments' efforts affect public participation in the decision-making process are still insufficient (West 2001; Yoon 2001; Kim & Kim 2004; Im 2006; Lee 2006a). In particular, Lee (2006a: 139) maintains that while the introduction of digital-based platforms certainly has an impact on the form of government service offered, it has not brought about an essential change in the process of decision-making between the government and citizens. Lee also points out that a controversial issue about democracy through digital media is whether the development of digital technology can engender more public participation and political involvement among the public (ibid).

In addition to this, there is a substantive problem with whether the success of a government's digital administration guarantees its democratic value. It can be doubted that some governments sincerely want to enlarge the publics' political participation and share all kinds of governments' information. Given the nature of politics and political actors to keep the power by monopolising information that is high in scarcity, this suspicion is often reasonable. Although the extensive use of digital media enables interaction and deliberation amongst members of societies and between the government and public, and even if access is seemingly open to all, one may often challenge the idea that all members can participate practically (Hague & Loader 1999: 13).

To sum up, considering these critics, one may doubt if the governmental digital communication tools encourage public participation in the process of the state's decision-making, and ultimately have the potential to improve democracy in society. Although it seems true that compared to the traditional media era governments have

encouraged more efficient public service delivery and enhanced mutual communications with the people through digital media, the challenges in terms of democracy remain.

3.4. Public participation in politics in the digital age

The public participation and their shaping the public sphere through digital media used as usual communication tools between people has been a significant focus of many observers. Katz (1997) anticipated that the emergence of a ‘digital nation’ resulted from networking culture would offer the means for the people to ‘have a genuine say in the decisions’ that influence their lives in the 1990s (Holmes 2005: 73). In this regard, this section examines the concepts of various types of ‘public participation’ shown in the digital age, such as shaping the public sphere and digital collective action of ordinary people in detail. Based on the analyses, it also discusses the democratic implication of public participation through digital media in the present era.

3.4.1. Public participation through digital media

Public participation is an essential conception in democratic societies and politics. It is how people can be empowered and increase their autonomy in the government’s decision-making processes. Considering the growing political role of public participation, John Stuart Mill claims that the development of individuality in taking part in politics is fundamental to cultivating and defending autonomy, which is also the principal aim of a democratic society guaranteeing liberty (Arendt et al. 2010:

2). Deepening public participation in politics can be regarded as a pivotal democratic factor to ensure and accommodate the will of the public at all levels.

Compared to the authoritarian era when ordinary people had fewer opportunities to express their opinions in the political realm, it is regarded that the people in the current age can have more chance to take part in politics through digital media. Regarding this, Neuman (2008) maintains that the digital media has ‘the potential to engage, inform, and empower the public to address political issues and events’ (Lawless 2011 edited by Fox & Ramos 2011: 212). Moreover, Aday et al. (2010) argues that digital media have not only promoted freedom of expression of the public, and sped-up the democratisation process in societies but also empowered political activists to combat against authoritarian regimes. In this vein, Jorba and Bimber (2012) claim that digital media technology allows more prosperous and diverse forms of communication and participation than traditional mass media did (Anduiza et al. 2012: 37).

The public’s political participation, which is regarded as a basic necessity to enhance the sustainability of democracy in the modern age can be considered as the interaction that makes democracy work (Nabatchi & Leighninger 2015). By using digital media in the present era, it became possible for citizens not only to be informed about decisions made without meeting in person but also to discuss diverse issues. The universalisation of digital media usages can mean that an even broader range of people can participate in discussions in a society regardless of personal background, and they form a sphere to discuss by themselves whenever they need.

In the digital age, direct citizen input into political processes becomes ubiquitous and viable digital political communities could form (Hill & Hughes 1998). Through the public sphere on digital spaces, the public can share their ideas and opinions on social and political issues more freely compared to the past. The public

spheres can be created by either active or passive and direct or indirect participation of the public through digital media. It can be seen that various public spheres are being created beyond the hierarchical level, on digital communication platforms that people use daily. In this regard, the focus of public political activity has shifted from formal politics to newly emerged concepts of politics that have been termed the ‘para-political domain’ (Dahlgren 2005), ‘sub-politics’ (Beck 1997) and ‘lifestyle politics’ (Bennett 1998).

Bennett and Segerberg (2011) argue that it is widely considered that digital media technologies have broken the “dominant communication sphere” held by political elites in the authoritarian era by creating a digital public sphere (Jamil 2018). In particular, according to Bennett and Segerberg (2012: 90), “Digital networking mechanisms play an important role in organising crowds and the traverse and connect networks can be significant for organising large-scale connective action in various ways.” Moreover, Loader and Mercea (2011) claim that the openness of social networking platforms can facilitate the potential of the ‘mass-collaboration (Leadbeater 2008)’ of individuals and groups who become the source of new innovative ideas in democratic practices.

However, some critics point out that the publics’ collective participation in the digital age may not always guarantee better democracy and public participation through digital media may not always positively affect democracy in society. Among them, Hands (2011: 140) claims that the collaborative power established through the digital spaces is ‘not distributed but resided at the centre’, and digital intelligence which are opinion leaders on digital spaces is likely to develop its agendas and mobilisations. Hands also perceptively argues that political mobilisation through digital media still needs to be constituted through ‘reflection, deliberation and recognition to

counterbalance the flocking and aggregation’ such as demonstrations based on populism (ibid: 136). Given that, doubts remain about the fact that public political collective actions organised through digital media can strengthen democracy.

3.4.2. The formation of public sphere in digital spaces

“Notions of political freedom and citizenship are rooted in the idea of the public sphere” (Malina 2005: 23). “Democratic justice entails treating all individuals as civic equals with equal liberty and opportunity” (Gutmann 2009: 192). In this sense, Habermas (2005: 4) stresses an alternative to the foundations of democracy in an equal dialogue circumstance. In a situation where it is no longer possible to realise popular democracy through complete economic equality among people, Habermas seems to have tried to find an alternative to the foundations of democracy in an equal dialogue circumstance. An ‘ideal public sphere’ can be regarded as ‘communication sphere guarantying freedom of expression and participation among the members of the society on a relatively equal basis’ (Habermas 1962, 1989 & 1991).

According to Habermas’s argument, in ideal communication situations, only authenticity and truth of the conversation contents are the core norm, the hierarchy and class background of the communication participants are not important, and thus an equal human relationship finally can be established. In the ideal digital public sphere, the public can have equal access to political communication that is independent of government constraint and, through its deliberative consensus-building capacity the public can, in turn, as a collective entity, constrain the agendas and decisions of the government itself (Axford et al. 2005; Sanders 2009). Considering Habermas’s ideal public sphere based on an equal dialogue circumstance, the situation that people can

communicate regardless of hierarchy and economic level on digital spaces seems to support a more enhanced form of democracy.

However, some observers argue that the notion of the Habermasian public sphere fundamentally needs to be reconsidered in the contemporary digital age. Regarding this, Dahlgren (2001: 37) argues that this Habermas's historical analysis on the public sphere dealt with at best only an elementary level of the features of democracy, without consideration about the features of the present digital-mediated societies. In a post-liberal era, when the classical model of the public sphere is no longer socio-politically feasible, there remain fundamental questions: "Can the public sphere be effectively reconstituted under radically different socioeconomic, political and cultural conditions?" and "Is democracy ultimately possible?". In this context, Kim (2005b) claims that the Habermasian notion of 'the communicative action rationality' needs to be reconsidered, with rhetorical and critical approaches.

Considering this, some scholars in the present era argue that digital media technology has a positive impact on the realisation of expanding political participation and creating digital spaces for public debate and deliberation (Huggins 2002; Axford et al. 2005; Jenkins 2006; Isin & Ruppert 2015). In particular, Storsul (2014) maintains that digital media technology integrates different forms of communication; it enables the public to frame controversies and expands political discussions to groups with more diverse audiences of varied social backgrounds. Furthermore, digital media expand the existing systems of political communication, allowing the expression of socio-political concerns not only to political elites but also to everyone (Thimm et al. 2014; Hepp & Krotz 2014: 257).

In this vein, it is regarded that the public sphere created in digital spaces can create the renewal of public discourses, based on 'a new social order that is constructed

from below as opposed to the dominant traditional system of political communication constructed from above (Coleman & Blumler 2009; Thimm et al. 2014; Hepp & Krotz 2014: 256)'. Regarding this, Thimm et al. (2012) maintain that digital media have the potential to build an egalitarian communication space (Thimm et al. 2014: 256), and in this vein, "Talk of digital communication can be regarded as talk of changing or improving democracy" (Hepp & Krotz 2014). Back to the Habermasian notion of the public sphere, it links to the 'deliberation' that is regarded as a subject of constant debate, interpretation, and reinterpretation.

However, some other scholars doubt the 'digital deliberation potential (Shapiro 1999)' on democracy. Hands (2011: 140) argues that the realisation of ordinary people's freedom of political expression through digital media can be sometimes seen, but the majority is still contained within a practice that is dislocated from grassroots decision-making and deliberation. Hands also adds that digital communication among the people does not have to do with the nature of democracy, it is merely employed to assemble advocates for a specific political issue, and rather help create hierarchical relations between advocates (ibid).

3.4.3. The linkage of digital media and democracy

The linkage between media and the possibility of democracy has been a long-established tenet of thinking concerning politics (Velázquez 2008; Sanders 2009: 23). In the late 1990s, scholarly acknowledgment of the paucity of participation in civic affairs and the increasing public cynicism (Elshtain 1995; Fishkin 1995; Putnam 1995; Cappella & Jamieson 1997) raised concerns about the potency of democracy (Tedesco 2004: 509). While digital media can provide a further means of exchange and deliberation with citizens that bypass normal time and space restrictions, at the same

time, digital communications rather can make individual engagements either weaker or more symbolic (Davis 2010). According to these scholars, it is still doubted whether or not digital development has the potential to enhance democracy by leading political participation and involvement of people (Lee 2006a: 139).

In this context, Stoker (2006: 201) argues that it remains a question that needs to be addressed in the impacts of political communication through digital media on democracy. Many voices from the public expressed through digital platforms inevitably entail many problems such as polarisation and social conflicts. In particular, there were criticisms that the quantitatively enormous opportunities for communication rather hampered the improvement of democracy in some ways. In this vein, Sunstein (2000) sees the ‘fragmentation or polarisation of society’ as possible downside of political communication on the Internet. Jennings and Zeitner (2003) also argue that digital communication might not result in actual participation or decision-making, and rather controversies could be rampant due to the expansion of diverse ideas and opinions of the public resulted from free mass communication through digital platforms.

Moreover, the immediate manifestation of information that did not go through deliberation due to the digital immediacy can undermine democracy. Regarding this, Hands (2011: 165) argues that while immediately shared political aims through digital media are rooted in tightly bounded, fixed space and time, allowing simple coordination of the collective and spontaneity of action, reflectiveness, and deliberation among individuals are not extensive. According to these critics, the formation of the public sphere in the political sphere does not always promise the development of democracy. In this regard, Castells (2011a) points out that people can come to conflicting conclusions about the political effectiveness of digital technology.

In contrast, at the same time, many advocates have optimistic perspectives on the digital media impact on democracy. Some scholars argue that digital media play a crucial role in democratic societies in underpinning the quality and functioning of democracy (Dahlgren 2001; Axford et al. 2005; Jenkins 2006). According to them, the formation of free communication and discourse through digital media can make a certain contribution to democratisation in the contemporary age. In particular, Holmes (2005: 73) maintains that digital media accounts of the public sphere lay claim to new kinds of politics, new kinds of ‘electronic assembly’, and even a return of participatory democracy. Moreover, Jenkins (2006) claims that the public’s digital participation is forming ‘participation culture’, which sustains the concept of participatory democracy.

More recently, more scholars argue that a democratic, participatory culture that is established through digital media helps ordinary people to participate in political debates and the democratic process (Loader & Mercea 2011; Aalberg et al. 2012; Schroeder 2018; Jamil 2018). Regarding this, Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015) argue that digital communications among the people “not only satisfy the fundamental needs and goals of them but also demonstrates the potential of public participation for making difficult decisions and solving formidable problems.”

In this vein, Isin and Ruppert (2015: 80) write that “Acts of participating in cyberspace are now seen as democratising.” Couldry (2015: 609) also states, “There is no question of denying that digital networks are significant, or that social networking platforms have important political uses, especially in mobilising disparate and previously unconnected groups of people.” Furthermore, Houston (2016: 2-3) claims that digital communication technologies can improve democratic practices and offer opportunities to contemporary people for a more extensive democratic rekindling. Considering this, it can be considered that digital communicative media reinforce

‘participatory democracy’ by enabling more people to take part in public political spheres.

To sum up, there have been considerable scholarly opinions about the impacts of digital media on democracy. While sceptical observers tended to disregard digital media as tools to reinforce political communication mechanisms and democracy, advocates consider that digital media stimulate deepened democracy. In particular, some of them argue that participatory democracy can be enhanced by expanding public participation. Given these conflicting arguments with regards to the democratic implications of digital media communications, more empirical studies are needed to identify the relationship between digital media communication and democracy.

3.5. Democracy in the digital age

Although some basic representative concepts of democracies such as ‘direct’ and ‘representative’ democracies have been regarded as authentically granted major concepts, the concepts of democracy in the present digital age need to be revisited based on the contemporary contexts. Thus, this section revisits the historical interpretation of the concept of democracy first, and then it identifies the conceptions of democracies in the digital communication context. Also, it analyses explicitly democratic values: equality, freedom of expression and public participation, as criteria to evaluate the democratic state of society, considering the discussions in the prior sections.

3.5.1. Classical theories of democracy

Democracy can be understood as a power transaction between the governing and the governed. The power relations between the rulers and citizens have been regarded as a critical determinant to democracy. According to discussions of democracy by existing scholars, it can be regarded that different characters of democracy are determined depending on where power is placed between the governing and the governed (Barker 2012). Regarding this, Schumpeter (1950) mainly emphasised the political leadership by arguing that politicians exert considerable control over the ordinary people by the manoeuvring and formation of the people's wants through political persuasion (Elliot 1994: 292). According to Schumpeter, democracy is an elitist model, with trade-off broad-based participation for stability and simplicity (Gagnon & Chou 2018: 5).

Meanwhile, there are some scholars who emphasise public participation in politics. Verba and Nie (1987: 2, 4) argue that political participation aims at influencing governmental decisions and has a crucial meaning in achieving social and political goals in society, which is ultimately related to democracy. Bogdanor and Brady (1994: 15) also argue that public participation is a fundamental value for democratic politics. In addition to this, Lipset (1995: 18) claims that whether democracy in society succeeds or fails continues to depend considerably on the choices, behaviours, and decisions of not only political leaders but also groups. Regarding this, Dahl (1961) asked a question about who actually governs in a system where every adult may vote but where resources such as knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials are unequally distributed.

According to Dahl (1961), "New Haven" is a democratic community, where most people are entitled to vote, but the resources fundamentally cannot be distributed

equally, which can be used to influence voters. However, at the same time, Dahl (1956, 2005) argues that despite the importance of high levels of democratic participation among lower socio-economic groups, it could rather result in authoritarian, or anti-democratic consequences. Furthermore, Pateman (2012: 9) stresses that criticism on greater public involvement in politics is that most individuals may not be sufficiently capable of doing so or are not interested. In this context, the disputes in terms of public political participation over the problem of democracy have increased with growing concerns that ordinary people cannot adequately understand and control an increasingly complex political function of industrialised states (Gagnon & Chou 2018: 8).

Considering the power relations between leaders and followers, various issues such as 'growing distrust of public institutions, a concentration of power amongst the most privileged groups in society' are still present in the contemporary era (Gagnon & Chou 2018: ix). As societies are differentiated more and involve different types of social conflict, it is difficult to explain modern society by classical democracy (Elliot 1994: 286). This fact can be the reason why a re-examination of contemporary democracy needs to be conducted with a perspective of power relations between the governing and the governed in the present political and social contexts in the digital era.

3.5.2. Different concepts of democracies

There have been some representative competing conceptions of democracies (Hague & Loader 1999: 5). Among diverse definitions, concepts of democracies can be distinguished with two representative but different categories traditionally: direct democracy and representative democracy. The term of direct democracy exclusively emphasises the power of citizens based on equalities in the process of political decision-making. Meanwhile, the meaning of representative democracy allows unequally

distributed power between political leaders and followers. While direct democracy is a form of democracy in which people decide on policy initiatives without any intermediary, representative democracy is the concept that ordinary people delegate the power to some representatives who can work on behalf of them for common interests.

While the ‘representative democracy’ models have characterised a large number of twentieth-century democratic societies (Hague & Loader 1999: 4), as for this there has been an argument that the elected representatives often do not represent the ‘will of the people’ and are likely to turn to elitism (Michels 1962) due to excessive authorised power. The concern about power abuse by a limited number of representatives in societies has been continuous. Regarding this, many scholars in more recent time, such as Wilkinson and Mulgan (1995), pointed out the limitation of representative democracy, saying that “Politicians have become tarnished with allegations of sleaze, corruption, self-seeking behaviour and sound-bite politics that may have produced widespread disillusionment and apathy amongst citizens and particularly the young.”

In this context, Hague and Loader (1999: 5) argue that debates about democracies have focused upon a sort of continuum, with direct democracy at one end of the scale and the representative democracy at the other end (*Figure 4*). In particular, participatory democracy (Pateman 1970) is regarded as the closest meaning to direct democracy in that it encourages the public to take part in political processes directly (Hague & Loader 1999: 5). Participatory democracy emphasises the wide-ranging participation in the direction and operation of political systems by implying that the people are in power¹². Furthermore, Schiller (2007: 52) claims that ‘direct, participatory democracy’ by the members of society can be a contrast to ‘representative democracy’, offering them more opportunities for participation in politics and ‘more democracy’.

¹² The author regards that direct and participatory democracies are at the same position in this study.

Both in democratic theory and practice, critical justifications for direct democracy are derived from deficits in representative governing systems (ibid).

Figure 4. A scale of direct / representative democracies



Source: Author

Turning to the digital age, many scholars have focused on ‘participatory democracy’ model that seeks the public’s direct governing based on the value of equality. Some of them who are in favour of participatory democracy often argue that modern digital technologies provide citizens with political resources and opportunities to expand the range of their political participation in a democratic environment (Prins 2001; Hara & Jo 2007). Moreover, Hara and Jo (2007) claim that digital technology does have an inherent advantage over the old format of one-way communication between politicians and citizens. Given that, it can be assumed that the people living in the present digital age could have more opportunities to participate in political and social affairs through digital media communications.

Considering these conceptions of democracies, Barber (2001) particularly argues that while digital technology enhances both direct and participatory democracy, it weakens representative democracy. On the one hand, he perceptively states that for advocates of direct democracy, digital technology that enables direct, free communication among people can be a boon of direct democracy. On the other hand, however, Barber claims that it can be a tragedy for representative democrats who believe a filter for popular passions and prejudices is required. At the same time, he also

points out that digital communication has the potential to bring about various social issues (ibid).

“If the horizontal communication capabilities of the digital platforms serve direct democracy's participatory bent, they are of less use to its penchant for popular deliberation. Immediacy is a democratic virtue, but it is also a democratic vice because the unmediated conversation can be undisciplined, prejudiced, private, polarising, and unproductive.” (Barber 2001)

With a more comprehensive perspective, Held (2006) maintains that the practical achievement of a state must involve a symbiotic relationship between both representative and direct and participatory democratic forms. Held argues that well-functioning democracy has to offer opportunities for the participation of citizens in all decisions concerning social and political issues, emphasising ‘democratic autonomy’, which can be a fundamental idea encompassing democratic values, at the same time. For Held, democracy in a country is required that is ‘reconceived as a double-sided phenomenon: concerned on the one hand, with the reform of state power and, on the other hand, with the restructuring of civil society’ (ibid: 316).

In modern society, ‘democratic autonomy’ may not merely come from voting representatives. This is disputed by diverse types of public participation that emphasise not power mechanism but the stable operation of the political system by the members of society is regarded as an essential democratic factor in the digital age. In this context, it is essential to note that there are a variety of ways of public participation in modern civil society where diverse social values coexist in understanding democratisation in democratic societies in the digital era.

3.5.3. Democratic values in a digital society

Woods-Gallagher (2001) emphasises, “Democratisation in society is a continual process.” The shaping of democracy in societies is continuously changing since its essential prerequisites are based on evolution (Dahlgren 2009: 6), depending on the social, historical background. Nevertheless, there are essential values, beliefs and principles that are fundamental to the concept of democracy, regardless of time and countries and which are regarded as universal standards to evaluate democracy. Among the matters concerning the shape of a democratic society in the context of the digital era, there are complex, inter-connected values regarding democracy: (1) Equality, (2) Freedom of expression, and (3) Public participation.

3.5.3.1. Equality

It is generally understood that equality in a democratic society is considered as a universal value, which is based on a theory that all citizens should have equal opportunities to have a voice about public decisions in the societies they share. To form an ideal communication environment in a democratic society, at least all citizens should share information equally. Through the digital communication process in societies, the individuals’ voices, which used to be marginalised in politics, could be much more directly, adequately represented in the political process. In this sense, some scholars tend to consider that in the current age, digital platforms play a role as public spheres that can realise more horizontal communication among the members of society by ensuring equality with anonymity. Furthermore, digital communication has been justified for giving equal opportunities to everyone and regarded as a useful means to diminish the informational gap and inequality of opportunity among citizens.

However, at the same time, there are other scholars who instead argue that digital technology is likely to reinforce pre-existing inequalities both within the government and between government and citizens (Danziger et al. 1983; Lax 2001; Lee 2006b) and widen the gap between information ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ (Rabb et al. 1996: 285; Lee 2006b). Garramone et al. (1986) also argue that digital communication technology broadens the gap between active political participants and inactive ones. More specifically, Baran (1995) and Hacker (1996) maintain that digital communication works to widen the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged in terms of economic and education (see, Tedesco 2004: 517). Such perspectives have become the basis of the issue known as the ‘digital divide’ which is another barrier to increasing political participation (Golding & Murdock 2000; Norris 2001; Bonfadelli 2002; Jensen 2006; Lusoli et al. 2006; Hindman 2008; Davis 2010).

In this vein, Veit and Huntgebruth (2013: 21-25) particularly point out that inequalities concerning participation in digital communication are another potential obstacle to democracy. According to them, people with limited access to digital spaces or limited ability to exploit digital sources may not be able to influence political discourse. They argue that it is the government’s work not only to fight against inequalities regarding access to digital technology but also to disseminate public information and provide public services through digital platforms on an equal basis (ibid). Given that, it needs to be considered that democratic society in the digital age has to find a balance between the new plurality of participation and equal opportunities (Giansante 2015).

3.5.3.2. Freedom of expression

Freedom in terms of the publics' expression can be regarded as a critical component of democracy. In a democratic state, each person has the right to take part in politics, know what the government does and express their point of view (Netchaeva 2002: 470). Democratic governance in a country should guarantee not only free and fair elections to vote in but also other kinds of freedoms in terms of speech and assembly. Regarding this, Hill and Hughes (1998) argue that people must communicate with others in order to engage in politics by communicating with one another. Digital technologies have enlarged the amount of information available (Hermanns 2008: 76) and enabled people either to express their opinions to the political leaders directly or to interact with them. Furthermore, through digital channels, the increasing flow and exchanges of information have contributed to expanding public spheres.

In this vein, some scholars argue that digital technologies enable the people to express their opinions relatively more often and efficiently in the process of democratisation and by doing so they can strengthen their civil rights of taking part in politics. Wescott (2001: 18) maintains that two significant points to digital communication that can support participatory and democratic processes are empowering civil society and allowing people to express opinions using digital media. Furthermore, Balkin (2004: 8) argues that political expressions through digital media become democratised since digital technologies are in the hands of an increasing number of people and increasingly varied parts of society.

However, some other scholars argue that it seems that digital communication has the potential to undermine the public's freedom of expression while it enhances the government's regulative power. Regarding this, Bennett (1996) maintains that by controlling political information, digital media can control the essential commodity of

democracy. In the meantime, Tedesco (2004) argues that while digital networking offers citizens free access to express their political opinions, through digital technologies political leaders can intentionally control political information without going through mass media that can check and balance political forces. According to Tedesco, one of the primary reasons that the Internet is so widely appealing to political officials and organisations can be that digital media offer a source-controlled form of communication (Tedesco 2004; Kaid 2004: 511).

3.5.3.3. Public participation

Democracy can be characterised as many different values, but the critical point is that in the current age, it must be able to accommodate the will of the public (Clift 2004: 37). Regarding this, Hague and Loader (1999: 12-13) claim that it is significantly considered that in order for a society to accomplish democracy a specific type of interaction between the state and civil society, and between the government and people is essential. Through mutual communication between the government and the people, a consensus should be made and reflected in the government's affairs as well as policies. In this vein, public participation is defined as the process by which the concerns, needs, and values of the public are incorporated into governmental decision-making (Creighton 2005).

The emergence of digital media drew attention to digital public participation in terms of decision-making. According to scholars, the ways of engaging in politics through digital media can include political discussion and talk, civic engagement, political knowledge and interest, attendance at political events, participation in calls for action by interest assemblies, and interaction with the government (Bimber 1999, 2003; Jennings & Zeitner 2003; Xenos & Moy 2007; Pasek et al. 2009; Bimber et al. 2009;

Jorba & Bimber 2012; Anduiza et al. 2012: 19). Due to digital media communications, people can perform mediated activities in order to seek to raise their awareness, give information to those who do not have one, offer social empowerment through participation, organise collective behaviours, and form coalitions on a universal level.

However, Sparks (2001: 2) argues that digital communication can form the power and participation in society either in positive ways by promoting the involvement of the public in political decision-making, or in adverse ways by obscuring the motives and interests behind political decisions (Tedesco 2004: 518). In addition, there is an arguable question in the theoretical context about whether the decrease of public participation may weaken or strengthen the representative nature of democratic government (Bennett 1998; Putnam 1995; Tedesco 2004; Kaid 2004: 521).

To sum up, there are key democratic values that are generally considered as essential prerequisites from the past to the present: equality, freedom of expression, and public participation. However, according to the discussions above, we can notice that beyond fundamental public rights that used to be taken for granted in the past, there have been differences of viewpoints about how democracy can best be expressed and achieved in modern society in the digital age (Stoker 2006: 9). Therefore, as media technologies develop in the digital age, the conceptions of democracies in societies need to be newly investigated and analysed, based on the evaluation of these core democratic values in the changing media and social contexts.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, the author tried to suggest the theoretical background of this research theme and intended to provide knowledge to build a theoretical perspective on conceptions of democracies concerning the digital age. This chapter focused on

examining the role of digital communication in democratic politics and society by discussing existing scholars' arguments. More specifically, the author analysed political communication transformation both through its political aspect and its public aspect, as well as its relationship with democracy depending on social changes.

Through this chapter, it was identified that there had been conflicting scholarly ideas on the impacts of digital communication on democracy in society. Considering the contemporary digital mediated society, it is still necessary to investigate whether or not, and if so, how, digital media communications influence the formation of a democratic society, or inversely. In this vein, to provide theoretical criteria for this study, the definitions of democracies and the key evaluative criteria of measuring democracy such as equality, freedom of expression, and public participation were explicitly examined. Based on the theoretical ideas discussed in this chapter, the following chapters will identify the relationships between political communications in the digital age and democracy by analysing the Korean case.

Chapter 4. Driving factors in establishing Korean digital society

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to understand Korea's cultural, political, economic and historical characteristics about the establishment of digital society. Firstly, it provides knowledge of the background to this research by explaining the specificities of Korea about the development of digital society in diverse contexts and perspectives. Secondly, to understand the Korean political contexts about political communication environment changes, it investigates the overall historical transformation of Korean politics by regime changes. Thirdly, it examines the economic situation that has considerably affected the formation of the Korean digital society. Fourthly, it explains the Korean democratisation process and discusses the state of Korean democracy. Based on the analyses of political and economic experiences, it finally analyses how Korean political communication and democracy have changed in the process of entering the digital age.

4.2. Specificities of Korea

Isaacs (1980: 37) points out that despite the remarkable accomplishments there is vagueness in understanding digital development in Asian countries because there is lack of sufficient explanations about unique historical, cultural, political, or economic contexts (Larson 2017: 1-2). This section examines Korea's specificities about digital development to extend knowledge and logical background in order to help to explain Korea's previous and present efforts on establishing and improving digital society. In

particular, Korea's rapid development towards digital-mediated society by achieving a great success of digital infrastructure establishment can be explained into diverse perspectives based on various internal and external influence factors.

4.2.1. Socio-cultural specificities

Korea is one of the countries that have been experiencing the most dynamic social and political changes recently. Indeed, compared to other countries, digital communication in Korean society has advanced fast for many reasons. Korea's unique national characteristics have affected the overall development of Korean society. The rapid social transformation can be seen not only at the governmental level but also at the societal level, or an interconnected level between them. In particular, the link between politics and culture is also a crucial element to understand Korea's growth process (Helgesen 2014: 8). Considering this, many observers acknowledge that the strength and nature of the developmental state enabled Korea to achieve rapid economic and political changes (Haggard 1990; Woo-Cummings 1999; Moon 2016; Park et al. 2016: 11).

It has been a powerful organising principle in East Asia, including Korea and strongly reinforced hierarchical values in bureaucratic governmental systems as well as in military systems (Bedeski 1994: 2). In this vein, Korean culture has been strongly characterised by Confucianism emphasising self-cultivated morality, interpersonal loyalty, familism, paternalism, hierarchical social structures and respect of authority and collective welfare (Kwon 2010: 197; Kim et al. 2002: 333-334). In general, it is regarded that a paternalistic, hierarchical social order made traditional society not only submissive towards an unchallengeable authority but also reluctant to embark upon changes in the social and political structure.

There are different perspectives on the influence of Confucian ideas and culture in Korea on social development. On the one hand, some scholars argue that widely accepted ideas of modern democracy are often in conflict with some of the paternalistic Confucian values, and due to this, the implementation process of the government has lacked its transparency, integrity and accountability (Helgesen 2001; Kim 2001; Kim et al. 2002). Furthermore, Lee (1996) maintains that the institutional framework of Korea has not allowed democracy to function because Korean political culture is incompatible with these infrastructural hindrances. He rather emphasises on specific stumbling blocks attributable to Confucian influences: the centralisation of political power, the indifference to public voices, and the rule of the individual rather than the law (Lent 1998:150-151).

On the other hand, some Western scholars and foreign press agencies point out that the cultural specificities of Korea are significant in describing the success story of such a robust digital nation (Lee 2012: 2-3). When it comes to the Korean case, it seems that the hierarchical social order played an essential role in transforming society (Helgesen 2014: 245). Regarding this, some scholars argue that the Confucian elements of respect for authority and hierarchy have reinforced hierarchy in both the political structure and the public and government relationship (Lingle 1996; Yun 2006; Kim 2010b: 801). The reinforced hierarchical social system can be regarded to affect a rapid decision-making process of the Korean government in terms of digital development plans. More specifically, it can be assumed that this hierarchical structure of Korean politics could have something to do with the government-led model that is one of the characteristics of the Korean case in terms of ICTs industry development.

4.2.2. Propensity of Koreans

There are some national characteristics that Korean people have. Firstly, the literacy rate in Korea is significantly high. Statistics Korea (2013)¹³ announced that as the future literacy rate is expected to be maintained at 99 per cent or more, there is no longer meaning to the national statistical surveys of literacy rate. This high literacy rate of Korean people can be considered as an essential requirement for the use of the Internet by a wide range of Koreans. Furthermore, the literacy of the people can be very relevant to their abilities to acquisition of ICT skills such as “physical access (access to ICT devices), financial access (cost of ICT services relative to annual income), cognitive access (ICT skills), design access (usability), content access (availability of relevant applications and information online), production access (capacity to produce one’s own content), institutional access (availability of institutions that enable access), and political access (access to the governing institutions where the rules of the game are written)” (Wilson 2004; Fuchs & Horak 2008: 101).

Secondly, people in Korea have a strong attachment to education. Many scholars have paid attention to Korean education fever (see, Lee 2005; Anderson & Kohler 2013). Regarding this, Seth (2002: 1) critically argues, “Education is a national obsession in Korea.” However, Lee (2016: 3) maintains that due to the traditional emphasis on education, Korea has a high rate of literacy and school enrolment and they are regarded as essential prerequisites for the widespread adoption of ICTs. In particular, the Korean government has not only assisted in building network infrastructure, but the adopted approach has also provided demand-side stimulants by promoting the educational benefits in a society gripped by ‘education fever’ (Choudrie & Lee 2004:

¹³Statistics Korea. (2013). ‘Approved suspension of literacy survey’
http://kostat.go.kr/portal/korea/kor_nw/1/1/index.board?bmode=read&aSeq=286874

111). The Korean case illustrates that if the demand for broadband Internet access can be matched by cultural expectations, such as the Korean emphasis on education, then diffusion can be rapid. In this context, it can be assumed that the desire for the learning of Korean people could have influenced maximising their interest to a new cultural challenge in the information age, the so-called digital-mediated culture.

Thirdly, Korea has a 'hasty culture, so-called 'Pali-Pali culture' that means hurry-hurry, which is a national characteristic. It can be said that this distinctive national feature has considerably affected Korea's fast growth in many ways, including digital development. Considering the unprecedented rapid process of establishment of IT infrastructure and settlement of digital culture, the case of swift broadband Internet deployment and usage in Korea demonstrates the importance of cultural sensitivity in the promotion (Choudrie & Lee 2004: 113). Furthermore, it can be said that the rapid learning attitude of the Korean could have become a driving force for the government to take more active actions in terms of the establishment of the digital society. It can also be applied to explaining why Korean people have strong tendencies to become early adopters (Yeo et al. 2012). Consequently, the social mechanism in which the 'Pali-Pali culture' deeply embedded can be one of the factors that can explain the rapid growth of Korea into the digital society.

4.2.3. Geographical and population density

Many observers note that Korea has achieved considerable development in terms of the digitally networked society, by taking advantage of the living conditions of urbanism and multi-dwelling environment. Korea seems to have many other advantageous factors in becoming a renowned developed digital society. In particular, the geographical density of the population can be regarded as an essential factor in the

speed Korea took to become a digitally developed nation. The relatively small size of the country and high population density served as advantages in terms of establishment of digital infrastructure.

Indeed, Korea is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with approximately 52 million people. Regarding this, Choudrie and Lee (2004: 112) argue that dense housing patterns deliver important economies of scale for broadband network distribution. A constructive characteristic for the cost-effective placement of the digital network infrastructure is the fact that about 80 per cent of Koreans lives in densely populated urban regions (Statistics Korea 2001¹⁴) (Choudrie & Lee 2004: 105).

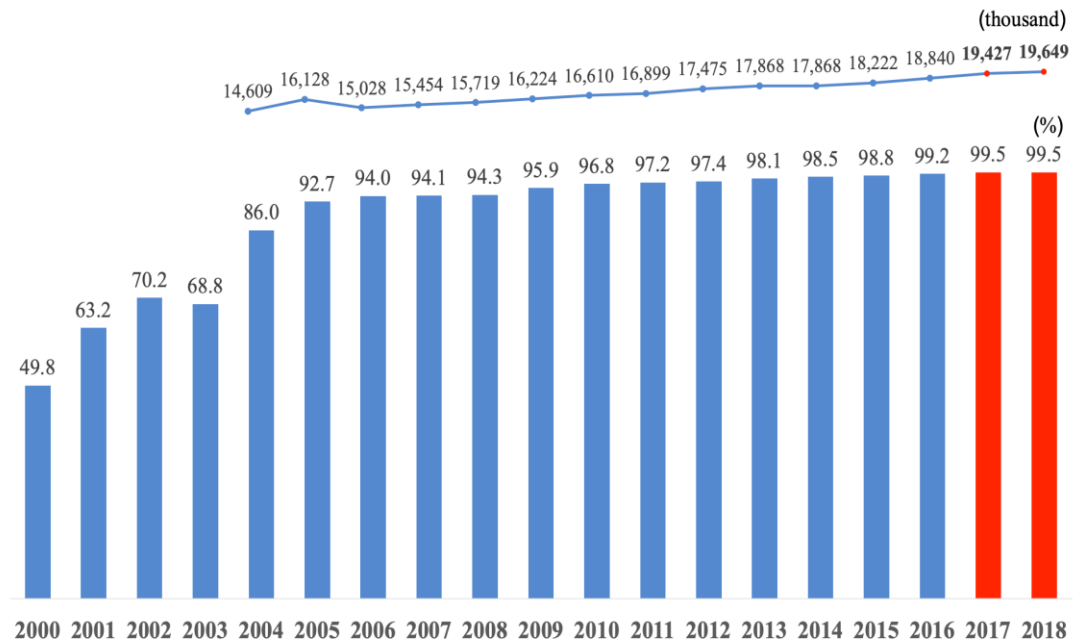
“The very high degree of urbanisation and dense housing patterns reduced the cost of network build (at a time when equipment costs were very high) and allowed the rapid deployment of new broadband infrastructure. The geographic and demographic features of Korea are certainly a factor that contributed to the fast deployment.” (Choudrie & Lee 2004: 112)

Based on the established digital network infrastructure, the rate of Internet usage has increased since the early 2000s continuously. Koreans had been spending even more time on the Internet than other developed countries’ people. More specifically, the people in Korea spent an average of 1,340 min on-line per user per month, which was already more than twice as long as for people in the U.S. (619 min) and almost four times the average time spent on the Internet in the UK (382 min) in 2001 (Choudrie & Lee 2004: 106). Turning to the present age, it has reached approximately 99.5 per cent

¹⁴ Statistics Korea. (2001). 2000 Population and Housing Preliminary Report (in Korean). <http://www.nso.go.kr/report/data/spce00-1.htm>. Accessed on 10 May 2002.

in 2018 (Ministry of Science and ICT [MSI] & Korea Internet and Security Agency [KISA] 2019) (*Figure 5*).

Figure 5. Survey on households with Internet access in Korea



Source: Ministry of Science and ICT [MSI] & Korea Internet and Security Agency [KISA](2019)

In addition to this, due to the widespread presence of SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter and mobile digital gadgets such as smartphones since the late 2000s, the Internet usage rate including the mobile Internet of the Koreans has also been very high. According to the statistical data, almost all Korean in the 10s to 40s use the Internet, including mobile Internet usage by gender and age group (*Figure 6*).

Figure 6. Internet usage rates including mobile Internet by gender and age group in Korea

Unit: %

		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total		76.5	77.2	77.8	78.0	78.4	82.1	83.6	85.1	88.3	90.3	91.5
Gender	Male	81.6	82.4	83.2	83.4	83.6	86.2	87.3	88.4	91.0	92.7	93.9
	Female	71.5	71.9	72.4	72.5	73.2	78.0	79.8	81.9	85.6	87.7	89.1
Age	3-9	82.2	85.4	85.5	86.2	88.2	80.1	78.8	79.8	82.9	83.9	87.8
	10-19	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.7	99.7	99.9	100.0	99.9	99.9
	20-29	99.7	99.7	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9
	30-39	98.6	98.8	99.3	99.4	99.5	99.7	99.8	99.8	99.8	99.9	99.9
	40-49	82.0	84.3	87.3	88.4	89.6	96.8	97.5	98.8	99.4	99.7	99.7
	50-59	48.9	52.3	55.2	57.4	60.1	80.3	86.1	89.3	94.9	98.7	98.7
	Over 60	19.0	20.1	21.8	22.9	24.4	26.8	32.8	39.5	51.4	58.8	65.4

Source: Statistics Korea (2019), Ministry of Science and ICT [MSI] & Korea Internet and Security Agency [KISA] (2019)

Based on these advantageous features, the government played a leading role in establishing the infrastructure of the digital society, and people have rapidly adopted the social changes. Furthermore, prevalent societal and cultural bases, such as Internet cafés, online computer game rooms, and web-community sites, affected the government's success in achieving an infrastructure with a rapid supply of information. Regarding this, many Western countries' ICTs related journals and television programs evaluated that Korea's digital trendy culture transformed the nation into the 'most connected country on earth' (Taylor 2006; Herz 2002; BBC 2010; PBS, Frontline 2008, 2010). In addition to this, Chung (2015) argues that among many Asian countries, Korea, a democratic state, is the leading example of a country rising from a low level of information and communication technology access to one of the highest in the world.

4.3. Historical changes in Korean politics

To comprehend a country's democratisation and developmental processes, it is necessary to analyse its historical and political backgrounds. Analysing how a state's own unique political culture formed as a society evolved is needed to be a first step in conducting social science research since it can provide underlying knowledge to political researchers. According to Woods-Gallagher (2001: 29-30), "Political culture is important democratic support. It regulates political behaviour among and between groups and individuals, and affects how the institutional system operates." Scrutinising the historical background of a country is essential to explain why the country made decisions in a specific historical context and how the decisions have influenced its social evolution. In this sense, it seems that the historical and political changes of the society in the process of democratisation can be a fundamental and critical part of the research. To comprehend the overall basic knowledge of the present research topic, this section examines the Korean political changes in its historical context. Furthermore, it also aims at articulating democratisation trends with the evolution of Korean media and political communication.

4.3.1. The era of authoritarian regimes (1910-1992)

Korea was ruled by a Japanese governor-general with a lack of sovereignty from 1910 to 1945. During those thirty-six years, the Korean political system changed in many ways, and political activities were also restricted by Japanese dictatorship. In 1945, South Korea (now the Republic of Korea, ROK) chose a different state-building route after Korean independence from North Korea (now the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK), along with an ideological line of the U.S. and the Soviet

Union, which support anti-communism and communism respectively. It can be said that from 1950 nationalism mainly took two different forms – communist in DPRK and anti-communist authoritarianism with democratic tendencies in ROK.

During that time in ROK, the minority of the Korean elite competed for authority and influence in the new political order. In this regard, there were activists like Kim Gu and Yeo Un-hyeong who tried to steer a middle path between these two. This ideological conflict has had a profound impact on Korean political history and still has a significant meaning in the present Korean society. More importantly, it can be regarded that this political history, in terms of the ideological skirmish, has affected the bi-partisan political structure of Korean politics.

Among the minority of the elites in Korea, Rhee Syng-man (1948-1960) became the first president. However, President Rhee had no real social basis in Korean society when he tried to seize power. Although he occupied the third president of Korea, UN and the U.S. sponsorships limited his autocracy, and his reign was overthrown in 1960. In the meantime, despite the Korean War and the existence of powerful military forces, democratic organisations kept going on. The levelling between rural and urban living conditions provided the material base for democratic institutions (Cole & Lyman 1971). The mixture of material growth, strong government institutions supported by a powerful military, political pluralism, limited democracy, and a tradition of conscience and dissent contributed to today's confrontation between the government and diverse parts of society (Bedeski 1994: 95). In this vein, Rhee's regime created a "political state" (Malloy 1976; Chalmers 1977) where democratic legal norms and institutions were deficient in a consistent framework.

As can be seen in many other countries' cases in the early days, military forces played a considerable, and sometimes dominant, role in political evolution. It can also

be applied to the Korean case at an early stage. Although Rhee's contribution to the creation of the modern Korean state is prominent, it is believed that he held a corrupt election (Bedeski 1994: 20-21). In the election held on 15 March 1960, Rhee attempted to keep the power by committing electoral fraud and violence, the so-called 3.15 rigged election. It eventually caused the collapse of his regime and 4.19 revolution in the same year, which was to blame the illegal presidential election. The Rhee regime tried to suppress the demonstration by mobilising the military and the police, and hundreds of students were killed or injured by the governmental authority in the process of the revolution. In short, political corruption and violence of the Rhee regime led to severe damage to the prospects for democracy in Korea.

The emergence of a dynamic relationship between the military dictatorship, authoritarian presidential leadership and bureaucratic expertise influenced the shaping of a powerful authoritarian presidential system (Hahm 2008: 183). In particular, during the authoritarian years from 1963 to 1993, Park Chung-hee (1963-1979), Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1988) and Roh Tae-woo (1988-1993) dominated, as they became successive presidents in Korea. These presidents, from the time they were generals and politicians, were surrounded by an interconnected elite group consisting of businesses, bureaucrats and other politicians by regional affiliations and educational and friendship ties (Helgesen 2014; Lee 2001: 197; Kwon 2010: 198).

Through a military coup in May 1961, Park Chung-hee (1963-1979) seized power and kept it for about eighteen years. Turning to the Park regime, military force in Korea played a stronger and more significant role. Despite the institutional and political crisis rooted in conflicts at that time, Park's political strategy based on authoritarianism created advantageous conditions for the popular coalition and broadened his regime's support (Im 1987: 255). However, due to the long-term dictatorship, President Park was

assassinated by Kim Jae-kyu, who was his chief of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency [KCIA] 26 October 1979. President Park is still recorded as a dictator in Korean history even though he is regarded as a leader who significantly influenced Korea's economic growth. Regarding this, Song (2013: 342) argues that since there was not enough time to prepare for democratising forces in order to cope with the political vacuum created after his death, the end of the Park's regime did not result in a transition to democracy. In short, the Korean society was politically and socially confused in the early stage of the foundation of the state, and overall it can be regarded that the strong power of the military regime is considered to have undermined Korean democracy by repressing the public will and freedom.

The 1980s are a significant time in the history of Korean politics. Various political events that occurred in Korea made the early 1980s a time of severe political repression and overrated military rule over the society and economy (Lew 1999; Mo & Moon 1999: 136). After Park's regime, another military force under General Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1988) succeeded in taking power on 12 December 1979, which means the extension of the military regime. The military force was formed by graduates of the Korean Military Academy, the so-called Hana-hoe which means One-group. Regarding this, much evidence shows that the U.S. supported the new military junta deploying troops to Gwangju (Lee 1996; Oberdorfer 1997: 124-125; Hart-Landsberg 1993: 148, 223; 2004: 200-201; Song 2013: 343). By completing their military coup thanks to the support by the U.S., General Chun, the leader of the military force, was elected president on 17 April 1980.

However, in the process of Chun's taking the regime, the new military regime committed the massacre of civilians. Against this backdrop, there was a democratic uprising, which was to resist the new military regime and realise democracy on 18 May

1980 in Gwangju, Southern-West part of Korea. While Chun's regime successfully repressed the uprising, during this period indeed many people were killed or arrested. As mentioned above, during the democratic uprising, the U.S. supported the government under Chun in order to maintain Korea as an anti-communist frontier in the Asian region (Song 2013: 345). In this sense, as the public recognised that the U.S. was responsible for the massacre in Gwangju, developing democratisation movements in that time tended to be anti-U.S. as well as anti-imperialist.

Throughout the late 1970s and until the declaration of democracy in 1987, the ordinary people's social and democratic movement could not produce any political expression as no party could challenge power at a national level. In a society before democratisation until the late 1980s, the government had forcibly blocked political information so that the people could not pay attention to politics. Under the oppressive social environment, the people could not voice freely and exercise a right to express their requirements to the government. Also, the government did not tend to care about the voice of the people; instead, it focused on maintaining its power.

In particular, during 5.18 democratic movement in 1980, the Chun's government the government intentionally blocked the Gwangju area and actively controlled domestic and foreign media in order to obstruct the flow of related information about the democratisation movement. As there were only a limited number of traditional media such as broadcasting, radio, and newspapers, the government relatively could easily block sensitive information related to governmental affairs and social issues. At that time, the traditional media penetration rate was also remarkably low. Since the major traditional media were only used as the main information delivery channels and these media companies were under the state power, controlling the information diffusion through the media could be a feasible idea for the government.

The government under Chun was founded on weak legitimacy due to its immoral ascent to state power. Due to Chun's ruthless governing regime, anti-government movements spread to a broad array of social groups, from opposition parties, labour unionists, students, members of the middle class and intellectuals to religious associations. Different classes from the elite to ordinary people took part in these anti-government demonstrations. These diverse social and political groups gathered to form anti-government forces with momentum towards June 1987, which is the so-called "June Resistance". After a nationwide series of massive demonstrations protesting against the illegitimacy of the military regime in 1987, the regime itself initiated a democratisation drive in Korea. With the total number of 500,000 people joining 514 different anti-government gatherings, demonstrations took place across the nation on 10 June, and the number of people who joined the demonstration reached 1,800,000 on 26 June.

In this vein, the year 1987 has a significant meaning in Korean society both in social and political contexts. Regarding this, a nationwide survey in 1988 showed that around 70 per cent of respondents named the political situation at that time as 'the gestation period of democracy' (Kwon & Han 1989: 5-6). This survey data seems to show that democracy was in high demand for ordinary people at that time. Furthermore, some Korean scholars such as Youm (1998), Kim (2000b) and Suh (2015) agree with the fact that Korea has made significant progress in procedural democracy since 1987.

"Since June 1987, Korea has made giant strides in embracing democracy as a political reality rather than as empty rhetoric. In fact, Korea has often been touted as a showcase of successful change from development dictatorship to civilian democracy." (Youm 1998)

The pro-democracy movement continued until when Roh Tae-woo, who was a presidential candidate of the ruling party at that time, declared the adoption of a direct presidential election on 29 June 1987 (Song 2013: 342-343). In fact, despite the immaturity of the Korean democracy in 1987, the direct election of the president and other electoral reforms at the national level are regarded as undeniable accomplishments (Mo & Moon 1999: 173). However, it can be regarded that there was another important political issue for Koreans in terms of connections between the previous regimes, which had been a target of the uprising, and the next one. At that time, Chun's regime opposed a direct presidential election and wanted to keep the existing indirect one for the sake of its favour and other parties did not reach the agreement to a single candidate. These political situations seemed to have affected the result of the 1987 presidential election. In the end, after the end of the Chun's regime, Roh Tae-woo (1988-1993), who led the soft-liners among ruling military elites, became the next president through the first direct presidential election.

Confronting the national crisis, Roh's regime had an administration goal to control democratisation as a priority (Bedeski 1994: 5) as well as to continue to push for economic growth. In this context, President Roh declared the conclusion of the Fifth Republic issues to the public, and it could mean that Korea entered a more democratic era. Regarding this, some observers argue that Roh's regime at least initiated political reforms aiming at breaking Korea's 'cycle of authoritarian rule'. As part of that, President Roh promised a free press to Koreans in June 1987: "The government cannot control the media, nor should it attempt to do so" (Youm 1998: 180).

However, considering media use and regulation, the Roh government was still not too different from Chun's situation. In this regard, Woo's (1996) content analysis of television news coverage of 1987 and 1992 Korean presidential elections makes it

possible to guess well the situation at that time. It describes that private and official television networks in both elections tended to frame events under the ruling party's vision by eliminating dissenting perspectives, marginalising the opposition and narrowing the spectrum of the political discourse. Woo also explains that these similarities in news coverage with the persisting government are through controls of the Korean media system through licensing, appointments, elite influence, and censorship (Kaid 2004; Willnat & Aw 2004) (ibid).

To sum up, Korean society had experienced a multitude of changes and unprecedented political transformation until the early 1990s. To restore political and social stability, efforts of the people, as well as the government for a more democratic society and recovery of society, were needed at that time. When the decisive pro-democracy movement happened, and autocracy was officially terminated, there has been continuous will from the public for democratisation. In this vein, despite non-democratic political and societal situations during the previous authoritarian period, it can be considered that Korean people obtained relatively extended freedom and human rights through experiencing the series of events.

4.3.2. The emergence of civilian regimes (1993-2007)

It seems that democratisation in Korea continuously evolved after the democratisation movement in 1987, both societal and political aspects. In particular, the presidential election in 1992 has a significant meaning in Korean political democracy in that the first civilian government by President Kim Young-sam emerged since 1960. Considering this, Minns (2001: 1035-1036) argues that during the chaotic political circumstances ruled by the previous authoritarian regimes, Kim Young-sam (1993-1998) and Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003), who were the opposition power at that time, took

advantage of the domestic political situation as a means for political objection to erode the legitimacy of the previous regime.

Before the election in 1992, Korea's successive authoritarian regimes had justified repression of human rights and political rights for a few decades. Ordinary people in Korea endured the political repression as long as the authoritarian regimes delivered on their promise of continued economic growth. However, when people experienced the response of an inept conservative regime to the national economic crisis, even if it was much less authoritarian compared to the previous authoritarian regimes, they withdrew support to the existing regime. In turn, Korea's severe economic circumstance of the financial crisis provided Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003), the long-term opposition leader, with an unexpected chance to become a president (Hahn 2008: 137).

During the period before the regime change in 1998, existing elite political forces formed the upper echelons of power and another elite insurgent who continuously raised criticism against them in Korean society. The commence of the Kim Dae-jung government, which is the latter, meant that a new elite force appeared as a ruling power in Korean society. On 18 December 1997, under the financial crisis, Kim Dae-jung was elected president through the direct election system. It can be regarded as a first regime change between the ruling party and the opposition party after the government formation in Korea.

Considering President Kim's success in the presidential election, Song (2013: 350) argues that it marked a famous landmark in the history of democracy in Korea because it was the first win of an opposition candidate in a presidential election. It is also important to be noticed that his victory was based on his popularity in the Gwangju

in Jeonla province where the democratic movements occurred in 1987. This fact shows that Kim's political support background was civilian society.

In his period as the sustained economic growth ground to a screeching halt, the government had to face the daunting task of implementing drastic reforms in the industrial and financial sectors. Thus, Kim's regime ambitiously implemented market-oriented reforms such as deregulation and privatisation to overcome the financial crisis in Korea (Kim 2010b: 803). In this context, the Kim Dae-jung government concentrated on recovering the economy, considering it as a primary governmental task to solve. The government pursued a small but powerful government to establish an economy according to neo-liberalism and at the same time tried to escape from the previous authoritarian government and improve the level of civic welfare. After the inauguration in February 1998, Kim government declared it would launch reform that aimed at remodelling the government's role and enhancing the efficiency of administrative affairs (Kim 2000a: 82). Those plans were focused on the institutionalisation of transparent governance and digital government development to promote openness, participation and integrity.

After President Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008), whose political base was progressive forces, was inaugurated as a president in February 2003. The result of the election in 2002 demonstrated that the public still turned out to support the opposition, seen as the progressive forces, following Kim's regime, even though Korean politics had long been dominated by authoritarian, conservative regimes based on *specific regional power*¹⁵ (Pastreich 2005). The Roh's government mainly focused on governmental reforms: the abolishment of the imperial presidency by purging

¹⁵ There has been hostile sentiment that arises from the competition between the regions for various reasons. Youngnam area (Daegu and Gyeongbuk, Southeast area) and Honam area (Gwangju and Mokpo, Southwest area) are in confrontational relations. In the history of Korean politics, it is generally regarded that the former supports the conservative party and the latter supports progressive party.

authoritarianism, governmental reform and decentralisation, and the formulation of a peace and prosperity policy with North Korea and economic policy emphasising welfare and distribution. Also, with the firm supports based on the civil society, Roh carried out plans such as cutting off a corrupt relationship between political and business circles, the liquidation of authoritarianism, and the growth of civil society.

In particular, Roh was not seeking a small government unlike Kim's regime but one that provided the services with the public need (Hahm & Lee 2008: 197), under the slogan "Participatory Government". His regime encouraged the participation of non-governmental sectors and tried to readjust relations between the government and civil society (Lee & Yun 2011: 298). It also made efforts to increase social cohesion and the voluntary cooperation of the public (Park & Wilding 2016: 1071). In this vein, diverse participatory mechanisms and the participatory democratic system to enhance administrative transparency were initiated by implementing the Participatory Government's Vision and Direction of e-government during his regime.

Plenty of studies suggest that there are similarities in Kim and Roh's administrations (see, Kwon 1998, 2005; Choi 1999; Song 1999; Kim 2000a; Kim & Moon 2002; Lee et al. 2010; Park & Wilding 2016: 1061). President Kim and Roh are different from the previous regimes of conservative administrations of the early democratisation era in many ways. Compared to the previous authoritarian regimes, much more extensive government reforms were taken through both de-concentration and deregulation under Presidents Kim and Roh (Park & Wilding 2016: 1066).

In particular, both regimes highlighted 'participatory democracy' in common: the active participation of citizens in the policy-making process, the democratisation of industrial relations, and the monitoring of state and business actors (Lee 2005; Kwon 2010: 203). Furthermore, it can be seen that prominent activists, intellectuals and public

figures from the democracy movements of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s participated in this process and many of them held key positions in the administrations of both President Kim and Roh (Doucette & Koo 2014).

4.3.3. The recent conservative regimes (2008-2018)

Korea has long passed the standard democratic benchmarks with the transition process in 1987 and the transfer of power to opposition parties (Haggard & You 2015: 167), dated either to the election of Kim Dae-jung in 1997 or the election of Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) in 2012. According to Park and Wilding (2016: 1060), Korean regime's changes can be characterised "transformational" (Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun) and "post-transformational" (Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye), respectively. By winning the presidential election on 19 December 2007, Lee Myung-bak, former mayor of Seoul, the capital city of Korea, became the next president after Roh in Korea. His winning of the election marked the triumphant return to power of the conservative party and brought to an end a decade of rule by progressives, who had two consecutive presidents, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun.

Despite some critics' concerns that it may have been too ambitious, President Lee promised reforms to lead to a return to the high economic growth seen previously during the Park Chung-hee dictatorship era and linking this to conservative blame of the bequest of progressive regimes (Armstrong 2008; Doucette 2010: 23-24). While President Roh pursued 'Participatory Government', President Lee followed 'Pragmatic Government'. Regarding this, Lee and Yun (2011: 311-313), who conducted comparative studies focusing on the Roh and Lee governments, suggest some reasons why they are different. Firstly, the political ideology and developmental discourses of the governments were considerably different. Secondly, the presidents had different

leadership styles. While Roh actively took part in the democratisation movement and perceived the importance of participatory democracy, Lee tended to show authoritative leadership as he used to take a CEO position in some companies including Hyundai that is one of the large conglomerates in Korea.

Lastly, the political support basis was fundamentally different, respectively. Given that, while the Roh government aimed at civil society to participating in policy-making to act as an alternative to bureaucracy (Park 2007), the Lee government tried not to include civil society actors who criticised his regime and policies. Furthermore, while Roh promoted a civil society-oriented government based on a horizontal network, Lee excluded the participation of civil society in the policy-making process, depending on the vertical and hierarchical network. Regarding this, a survey conducted by the Institute of Korean Political Studies at Seoul National University, during the time period from 17 to 20 October 2012, show that 90.5 per cent of respondents of 1,026 samples agreed with the opinion that “The present political system does not respond to the public voice” (Sohn & Kang 2013: 201).

It can be said that the initiatives on a civic engagement under Lee’s government have considerably stepped back. The Lee government also abolished the Government Information Agency [GIA], which was the central governmental communication institution in 2008. Instead, all the functions of the GIA were absorbed into the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism [MCST]. It shows that Lee’s government did not emphasise communication with the public. The Lee government’s policies focusing more on economic growth tended to deemphasise public relations relatively. Regarding this, Lee and Yun (2011: 289) argue that Lee’s administration based on the conservative power is more authoritarian with state-centred governance than the Roh’s administration, which based on progressive power with civil society-centred

governance. Furthermore, they also claim that Korean society has been suffering from fragmented and blocked communication from the Lee administration (ibid: 314).

In 2012, Park Geun-hye (2013-2017), who was the representative of the conservative party, was elected as the first female Korean president. The result of the election proved that Korean voters were almost evenly separated¹⁶, and it fell on her to assume the reins of government. The conservative power's successive winning of two presidential elections at that time may demonstrate that Korean people's support for the radical reforms of the previous political power was weaker than their will of economic recovery. Similar to the Lee government, the Park regime was criticised by the opposition political power, progressive journalism and citizens for the lack of communication during her presidential term continuously.

President Park only took part to official press conferences on five occasions during her four-year incumbency. This figure is remarkably low, compared to previous presidents. Lee Myung-bak held press conferences 20 times and, Roh Moo-hyun and Kim Dae-jung 150 times, respectively. Many experts even point out that "Park's unwillingness to communicate with her people as well as her cabinet members created the national crisis" (The Seoul Times, 2 May 2017¹⁷). Although President Park tried to strengthen digital-based administrative systems and develop digital technologies for economic reasons, she seemed to fail in communicating with the people.

Although the Korean presidential election is held at the end of the year every five years, an unexpected presidential election was held earlier than the scheduled date due to the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye. Moon Jae-in (2017- the present) was elected in the presidential election on 9 May 2017. It means that the progressive

¹⁶ In the 2012 presidential election, while Park Geun-hye who was the candidate of conservative party gained 51.55 per cent, Moon Jae-in who was the candidate of progressive party obtained 48.02 per cent.

¹⁷ The Seoul Times. (2017). "Park Geun-hye Unwilling to Communicate, Her Undemocratic Style Leads to Impeachment" <http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=13250>

regime was back again after ten years of the consecutive conservative regimes. President Moon served as a Senior Secretary to the Presidential for Civil Affairs during the Roh administration and had had a strong relationship with Roh since he worked as a human rights lawyer. Regarding this, many observers maintain that the Moon government took a political succession from the previous progressive regime. Indeed, similar to the Roh regime, the Moon administration enthusiastically is taking advantage of digital platforms as tools for encouraging public participation as well as increasing their political interest.

In particular, the Moon government solidified his political position with the motto ‘liquidation of the accumulated evil’, which aimed at the immorality of the conservative regimes. The newly emerged progressive regime under President Moon actively used digital channels as a means for attracting the public’s participation by criticising the morality of the former conservative regimes. It is regarded that the Moon government’s communicational orientation is similar to that of the previous progressive regime in that it actively tries to communicate with the public. In this sense, it is considered that the Moon government’s differentiated strategy in terms of public communication was effective in attracting support from the public who were highly antagonistic to the former conservative regimes.

4.4. Economic growth, democracy and digital economy in Korea

The early stages of the Korean development can be characterised by mainly two factors: a broadening democracy and rapid economic growth. In particular, Korea is very well known as a country that achieved rapid economic growth, compared to other countries in the world. It is generally regarded that a country’s economic situation profoundly affects society as a whole. In this sense, Korea’s economic growth has a

very significant meaning in understanding the overall circumstances of social, political development. Regarding this, the present section analyses the Korean economic growth and the economic features of the Korean society in detail and also discusses the relationship between economic growth and democratisation by considering the development as a digital society.

4.4.1. The relationship between economic growth and democracy

Although there is no consensus among scholars on the relationship between democracy and economic growth, it has indeed been a big issue. The controversies over the relationship between political development, economic growth, and democracy in societies have been continuous (Baum & Lake 2003: 333). The empirical literature on the relationship between democracy and economic growth is divided into two different opinions. On the one hand, some scholars find that democracy is positively related to economic growth and others finding the opposite (Sirowy & Inkeles 1990; Przeworski & Limongi 1993; Baum & Lake 2003). According to them, the theoretical position of democracy may be regarded both as an impediment and facilitator of national growth. On the other hand, other scholars maintain that there are only limited correlations between them. For example, Baum and Lake (2003: 333) claim that while in general democracy has no prominent statistical figure on direct effect on growth, the effect of democracy on economic growth is merely indirectly related and it depends on the level of economic and educational factors.

In this vein, the relationship between democracy and economy is noteworthy of consideration to understand Korean democratisation. When it comes to the Korean case, there are many different opinions in terms of correlations between democracy and economic growth. Hahm and Lee (2008: 183) anticipated that economic growth might

cause new realities to the authoritarian structure of the Korean governmental system in terms of political democratisation, by arguing, “Political democratisation and economic growth in Korea are correlated with each other.”

In the meantime, there is also a sceptical point of view on whether the rapid growth led to the overall quality of the national development of Korea. It is considered that the political system in Korea became increasingly autocratic with the growth of the national economy, in contrast to the argument that economic development and democratisation are positively correlated. Regarding this, Minns (2001: 1031) claims that as the conflict between the government and the public became severe, Korean economic growth was rather getting slow.

4.4.2. Korea’s economic growth process

Regime-specific economic policies are based on fundamentally different political ideologies of each regime, so their routes in terms of economic development are different. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, President Park Chung-hee tried to cement the economic framework that made Korea a leading modern nation in terms of its high economic growth. The Korean economic growth during the 1970s and 1980s was achieved through the nation’s active interventionist and export-oriented policies, which was based on the labour-intensive industries. During that time, Park’s regime was eager to enhance the efficiency of transportation and communication to attain an advanced economy. At the end of the military regimes, the government strived to industrialise the national economy, which lagged far behind advanced countries. It can be called the ‘industrial modernisation project’, and it managed to develop the domestic economy very rapidly.

“In general, it is evaluated that during the Park’s regime, economic development and national strengthening proceeded rapidly. Since then, the main issue was no longer poverty. However, the problem of the unequal distribution of wealth rather was an obstacle to democratic development.” (Helgesen 2014: 5)

It can be considered that the government programs aiming to modernise and industrialise Korea at that time obtained momentum in that period, and a variety of efforts for economic growth resulted in Korea’s great economic strides. However, Park’s regime has a limit as it is often described as “economic growth through dictatorship” (Lee 2012: 77). In this context, against the previous authoritarian regime’s corruptive economic measures, Kim Young-sam’s government ambitiously began to conduct a series of political and economic reforms, including anti-corruption measures. Based on the civilian background, President Kim pursued implementing economic liberalisation under the name of democracy, which is for the process of eliminating the authoritarian and existing oppressive traits and withdrawing its interventionist role in economic development (Song 2013: 346).

However, many scholars argue that his radical economic liberalisation led to a reckless and immature opening of the financial markets and caused havoc for the Korean economy (Chang 1998; Crotty 2000; Stiglitz 2000; Song 2013: 347). Indeed, Korea officially announced the financial crisis in 1997, with a \$57 billion bailout agreement with the International Monetary Funds [IMF]. This financial crisis profoundly affected not only socio-political but also economic circumstances. Regarding this, Mo and Moon (1999: 173) argue that Korea’s financial crisis was compounded by the immaturity of democracy or the explicit failure to consolidate democratic reforms.

Meanwhile, although the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments are progressive regimes, they were by no means progressive in terms of the main economic and foreign policies, including extensive labour market deregulation, and multiple free trade agreements. Regarding this, Doucette (2010: 34) criticises that even though Kim Dae-jung tried to implement the parallel development of democracy and a market economy, there was no comprehensive plan for restructuring the state administration. It is considered that Kim's administration failed to broaden the participation of social forces from labour and civil society to conglomerates in Korea. Furthermore, Hahm and Lee (2008: 182) claim that the experiences of the Roh's administration, which is similar to those of Kim's administration, are simply trials and errors of democratisation.

In this vein, Choi (2005, 2012) argues that the lack of a solid economic front to liberal and progressive campaigns by those consecutive regimes allowed the conservative party's return to the main stage of Korean politics (Doucette 2010: 34). Turning to the new conservative regime under President Lee Myung-bak in the late 2000s, the favourable conglomerate policies were expanded. The Lee's administration removed laws limiting the expansion of the large conglomerates, regulating high trading rate to export, and managing corporate tax or paramilitary labour oppression. Under Lee's administration, most of them have enormously expanded their business without the government's strict sanctions. In this context, the Korean government's dominance over the family-owned large conglomerates (hereafter "Chaebols") has gradually waned while the more substantial conglomerates affected the overall economy by absorbing other small and medium-sized companies.

4.4.3. The symbiotic relationship between political and economic forces and the digital economy

As the Korean economy is mostly dominated by Chaebols, Korean society has a social structure that the political forces inevitably connect with them. Many scholars have studied the transformations of the relationships between two dominant political and economic elites forces in Korea (Kim 1988; Jeon 1994; Moon 1994; Nam 1995; Evans 1995; Hundt 2005; Lim & Jang 2006; Lee & Han 2006). Based on these scholars' arguments, the relationships can be interpreted as a kind of "symbiosis" between two major driving powers of the state, standing on political and economic sides. During the Park Chung-hee's regime in the 1970s, the relationships between the government and economic power were strongly formed (Johnson 1987: 145; Lee 2012: 77).

This symbiotic relationship involved the government providing moneymaking licenses to Chaebols, and in turn, these corporates donate considerable amounts of political slush fund to the political power. According to Lee (2012: 76-87), from the late 1980s, the Korean government had to respond to internal pressure, the elite Chaebols' growing power, to transform its developmental mechanism. For this reason, the early civilian government strategically favoured those Chaebols by keeping the military regimes' export-oriented policies. It was both for establishing a new economy and improving the export of high-tech outputs (ibid).

While the mutual relationships between the government and the Chaebols have produced remarkable economic growth, it also brought about other problems, such as corruption and an unequal market environment (Lee 2012: 84-88). Considering this, Lee (2012: 87) critically points out that the eccentric mechanism of the developing nation during this time promotes an unethical business culture, power elitism, cronyism,

corruption, corporate suppression of labour, deep class divisions, and the public's exclusion from the decision-making process.

It is considered that the “parasitic bond” between corrupted national bureaucrats and monopoly capitalists was also severe under a politically progressive administration that was different from the previous authoritarian regimes. There were concerns about the balance of the power between politics and the economy in Korea. In this vein, President Roh Moo-hyun particularly expressed concern about the growing power of the Chaebols in the transformative and evolving power relations, saying that “We have already entered into the age of big capital having the upper hand over the state” (Kim 2005a).

Although there were concerns about the balance of the power between politics and the economy in Korea, the symbiotic relationship between political power and Chaebols seems to affect the process of digital development in Korea. Mansell and When (1998: 123) argue that given unique Korea's political and economic contexts, ‘the economic-governance process and political, institutional arrangements’ needed to be considered in the context of digital development in Korea (Lee 2012: 89). Indeed, the close relationship between the government and conglomerates can be seen in the process of digital development in Korea. The Chaebols' privileged position in the local market enabled them to extend their market dominance into the new mobile telecom service business. It can be regarded that the government intentionally helped the Chaebol-owned mobile network providers by creating or structuring a new profitable market rapidly.

Furthermore, in order to create new sources of profit from the high-technology plans, the Chaebols ceased exports of low technology products, which was an action to respond to the transition of the world economy into the digital productions. The existing

Chaebols, such as Samsung and LG, extended their market dominance into other IT sectors, such as the global sales of mobile products and semiconductors. As a result, Korea Telecom [KT], the national incumbent, took almost half of the market share in the broadband service market, and LG's subsidiaries ranked the second tier with a market share 14 per cent in 2007. Through this process, a new type of Chaebol, which are the so-called "e-Chaebols", emerged in Korea (Chang 2003). In short, it can be said that not only the role of government but also one of the large corporations were particularly significant in the digital developmental process, and they seemed to be cooperative with each other for their benefits.

4.5. The relationships between digital development and democracy in Korea

According to the preceding section, it was identified that there are co-relationships between various social factors in Korea and the development of the Korean digital society. In particular, it is considered that digital communication, which is deeply and widely embedded in Korean society, has an important meaning in shaping democracy in Korea. In this context, to understand the relationships between digital development and democracy in Korea, this section analyses the democratisation process in Korea and political media communication changes in that process. Also, it discusses the social impacts of the present digital media communications in Korea on the overall democratic stability of society.

4.5.1. Consolidation of democracy in Korea

Korea used to be one of the developing countries that suffered from poverty, insecurity and the dictator's repression. Political power in Korea has been highly

concentrated on presidential power. In the authoritarian periods, the centralisation of political power and the rule of the individual rather than the law were the barriers to democracy in Korea (Lee 1996; Lent 1998: 151). However, according to Korean constitutional law article one and paragraph two, the citizens have the sovereignty of Korea, and all the powers come from them. Early Korean society has tried to consolidate its democracy by changes of government through competitive elections and by establishing the rule of law on democratic principles (Alagappa 1995; Im 2010; Suh 2015).

Many scholars and pundits have studied Korean democratisation, and more descriptively put forward various definitions or evaluations of it. The Korean democratisation process has been characterised as a ‘transition through social movement (Bae & Kim 2013: 10)’ and a ‘civil revolution from below.’ Korea’s democracy has become a force from the very social power, such as the democratic social movements from the public. In particular, the democratisation in Korea from the 1970s to the late 1980s within the context of social class struggles, showing how a particular class power balance that emerged along the democratisation process gave a specific meaning and content to democracy (Song 2013: 339).

The pro-democracy movement in mid-1987, in which middle-class Koreans played a significant role, resulted in a series of concrete democratic reforms Korea closer to recognising free media as being essential to its political openness (Youm 1998: 188). The coordinated efforts of the public provided the major impetus for the nation’s democratic transformation (Lim & Tang 2002: 565). It is also true that many different social groups took part in the movement to restore democracy and ensure human rights. In this regard, Lew (1999: 165-167) maintains that Korea has become more democratic from the early 1980s to the 1990s.

Some pundits who have studied the Korea's democratisation process argue that Korea's experience went through the following steps: (1) 'the decline or demise of authoritarianism,' (2) 'the transformation of democracy,' and (3) 'the consolidation of democracy' (Burton & Ryu 1997; Hahm & Kim 1999; Shin 1999; Im 2000; Schedler 2001a, 2001b; Hahm 2001; Kim et al. 2006; Hahm & Lee 2008). The definition of democratic consolidation can be the process that democracy becomes matured. Consolidating democracy involves not only maintaining democracy but also completing and deepening it (Schedler 1998; Kim & Kim 2009: 56). In this vein, some scholars argue that Korea's democracy seems to be one step further in recent studies. Diamond and Kim (2000: 1, 21) maintain that Korea has entered another stage of democratisation, 'democratic consolidation.' Im (2000) also agrees with Diamond and Kim by claiming that Korea completed the first stage of democratisation and entered the stage of democratic consolidation.

However, there are still many critics who evaluate that Korea still has faced unstable political and social conditions. Im (2000) argues that Koreans have been arguing such issues as the preferred type of democracy by probing the structural, institutional, and cultural opportunities and threats that previous Korea faced. Im (2004) criticises explicitly that Korean democracy is faltering and suffering from an imperial presidency, oligarchic parties, divisive regionalism, political corruption and the public's low trust in politics. Furthermore, Choi (2005, 2012) indicates that Korean elite-dominated politics harms in consolidating democracy by interfering with the political opposition's action.

In addition, Sohn and Kang (2013: 200-201) claim that Korea still confronted challenges to resolve divisions between generations, classes, and regions. Hahm (2008: 129) also emphasises that it is still hard to put that democracy is fully consolidated even

though Korea has succeeded in establishing its democracy. While the foundation of a liberal democratic order has been consolidated, there are still areas where Korean democratisation needs to make more progress (ibid: 141). Regarding this, Helgesen (2014: 15) maintains that the conflict between ideal and reality has often undermined political stability in Korea.

Despite the various concerns about Korea's democratisation, an official numerical data of democracy still shows that Korea's democracy has developed compared to the authoritarian periods. According to the Freedom House online, self-defined as 'an independent watchdog organisation dedicated to the expansion of freedom around the world,' Korea has been ranked as a 'free' country even though democracy on the net is still 'partly free' (see, *Figure 1*, p. 7). Below is a figure of ranking changes in Korea from the democracy in 1998 when it was time for Korea to intensively develop ICTs under the Kim Dae-jung regime to the year 2019 (*Figure 7*).

Figure 7. Ratings on democracy in Korea from 1998 to 2019

(1=Best, 7= Worst)

Presidents	Year	Freedom Rating	Status	Civil Liberties	Political Rights
Moon Jae-in	2019	Free	2	2	2
	2018	Free	2	2	2
Park Geun-hye	2017	Free	2	2	2
	2016	Free	2	2	2
	2015	Free	2	2	2
	2014	Free	2	2	2
	2013	Free	1.5	2	1
Lee Myung-bak	2012	Free	1.5	2	1
	2011	Free	1.5	2	1
	2010	Free	1.5	2	1
	2009	Free	1.5	2	1
	2008	Free	1.5	2	1
Roh Moo-hyun	2007	Free	1.5	2	1
	2006	Free	1.5	2	1
	2005	Free	1.5	2	1
	2004	Free	2	2	2
	2003	Free	2	2	2
Kim Dae-jung	2002	Free	2	2	2
	2001	Free	2	2	2
	2000	-	-	-	-
	1999	Free	2	2	2
	1998	Free	2	2	2

Source: Freedom House (1998-2019)

Finally, based on the preliminary analyses, **Figure 8** below comprehensively shows political, economic, and democratic changes in Korea.

Figure 8. Korean regime changes with democratic and economic evolutions

President	Time	Level of democracy*	Types of regime	Economical status
Rhee Syng-man	1948-1960	Tentative democracy	Conservative	One of the poorest nations
Yun Po-sun	1960-1962		-	
Park Chung-hee	1963-1979	Hard Authoritarianism (Military government)	Conservative	Labour-intensive manufactured exports oriented industrialisation
Choi Kyu-hah	1979-1980	Stop-gap president	-	
Chun Doo-hwan	1980-1987	Hard Authoritarianism (Military government)	Conservative	The government-led economic growth strategy
Roh Tae-woo	1987-1993	Re-democratisation	Conservative	
Kim Young-sam	1993-1998		Conservative (Civilian gvt)	The Financial Crisis in 1997
Kim Dae-jung	1998-2003	Democratic consolidation	Progressive (Gvt of the people)	
Roh Moo-hyun	2003-2008		Progressive (Participatory gvt)	More market-oriented economic growth strategy
Lee Myung-bak	2008-2013		Conservative	
Park Guen-hye	2013-2017			Income-driven, Welfare-oriented Economic Growth
Moon Jae-in	2017-		Progressive	

Source: The typology was conceptualised in Korean Government Regimes (Park 2013: 56) based on Ringen et al. (2010: 2)

4.5.2. Digital communication impacts on Korean democracy

It is difficult to determine causality between democratisation and development of technology. However, it is regarded that there are significant differences in terms of digital communications' social influences, depending on whether these influences are either liberal or non-liberal or democratic or non-democratic (Anduiza et al. 2012). Dictatorial countries tend to provide limited services as well as information and prevent

their people's voluntary participation. In this regard, Abbott (2012) argues that if undemocratic governments operate digital media, it rather can make it less likely that the digital media will play a distinctive role in further democratisation (Jorba & Bimber 2012; Anduiza et al. 2012: 30).

Considering the Korean case, it can be said that as the transition of Korean political systems has gone from authoritarian military dictatorship to civilian democracy, there have also been changes in the overall governmental system and democratisation process. It is also regarded that the attitudes of not only the government but also the people seem to have been transformed following media environmental and societal changes. In this vein, there is a crucial point to be noted that it was after the liberal regime exerted power that the government began to develop ICTs and intensively invested in digital-related projects in Korea.

“If Korea was not a democratised country, the government would have provided the public with regulated and limited online service like other dictatorial countries such as China. However, since the Korean government proceeded with the informatisation under the first democratic government that was born after the democratisation, the government-led model could be accepted by the people. In this sense, there could be a democratic-oriented aspect here.” (Lee, W. T., a senior researcher from the KISDI, 22 September 2017)

When it comes to the relationship between digital media communication development and democratisation in Korea, scholars' perspectives vary. The development of digital government in Korea can be described as a history of the ongoing struggle between the values of development, efficiency and democracy. Considering the historical background and characteristics of the Korean government's

digital media use, the rapidly evolved digital communication environment can be regarded as an essential factor in explaining democratic development in Korean society. More specifically, digital communications have the potential to transform the political communication mechanism democratically by enabling not only political leaders and civil servants but also ordinary people to use political resources easily.

In particular, it can be regarded that equality among the people in terms of expression of opinion was considerably enhanced in the digital communication environment due to anonymity. The anonymity that is possible on digital spaces allows people to communicate with each other through digital media on an equal basis. Anonymous digital communication atmosphere helps the relationship between the government and the public in Korea to become more horizontal than hierarchical. Regardless of hierarchical status and economic conditions, the people in Korea seem to have reached the level to express their opinions through digital platforms. In this vein, the widespread usages of digital platforms can narrow the power gap between the elites and the public (Kim 2006: 54). Regarding this, many observers consider that digital media can be considered as effective tools for consolidating democracy.

In contrast, there are opposing opinions about the correlation between digital media and democratic consolidation in society. Some scholars argue that ironically, digital communications have strengthened the existing inequality of the political representative system by serving the interests of social and political elites. According to them, inequalities of accessibility to politics between social, political elites and politically marginalised citizens may deepen (Davis 1999; Norris 2001; Im 2006). Regarding this, Hill and Hughes, Resnick, and Bimber argued that the use of digital technology does not change the pattern of existing political participation, but rather strengthens information inequality (Lee 2004c). Considering this, information

inequality among the people created by the advent of the digital age can severely interrupt the growth of a democratic society.

Furthermore, these critics consider that social inequalities in Korean society have not diminished with the development of digital communication by the Korean government. It can be regarded that digital communications in present society rather deepen social inequality among the people. It is because while there are producers and information-heavy users who occupy massive traffic of it, there are also people who are not able to access information quickly such as older generations who are relatively less used to utilising digital tools. In this context, the digital divide that is a result of power imbalance has generated continuing controversy.

“I think the government’s digital media use is quite advantageous to reduce the information gap among citizens. However, the digital divide remains. Online communication has little influence the senior citizens’ participation, and rather, it plays a role to alienate them.” (Kim, T. K., a senior civil servant from Seoul City Hall, 21 September 2017)

A public sphere can be formed in digital spaces. However, this virtual place can be where intense polarised conflicts are expressed at the same time. Social polarisation can be maximised in Korean society as much as many people communicate through digital media. Korean society is suffering from social polarisation in diverse aspects such as economic and political ideology and cultural differences depending on gender, age, and economic and social position, which is shown in digital spaces¹⁸. Considering this, although it can be admitted that digital media may improve people’s participation

¹⁸ The controversies of the society in digital spaces over President Park Geun-hye's political scandal in 2016 and the qualifications of a candidate for the Minister of Justice in 2019 show the political polarisation of Korean society. In addition to this, conflicts between genders regarding sexual issues such as spycams, sex abuse and sex scandal of celebrities in Korea have been expressed in digital spaces continuously.

in social communication, it is unclear whether or not the digital media communications among the ordinary people have overall strengthened and consolidated democracy in Korea.

Also, a large amount of tabloid information containing unconfirmed facts is widely and rapidly circulated on digital platforms in Korean society, which causes social confusion. Due to the many social problems with false information in digital spaces, the Korean government tried to control the digital communication spaces. However, the government's measures and regulations on digital media communication among the public today sometimes seem to be excessive. In this context, some scholars argue that political impediments of Korea such as the institutional framework of the country and political corruption in each regime have not allowed democracy to function due to the unstable Korean political culture.

According to the discussions above, it seems obvious that digital media communication has the potential to either strengthen or undermine democracy. However, considering these diverse democratic issues in the digital age, it can be said that it is difficult to clearly explain the impact of digital media communication on democracy in Korea. Therefore, further investigations are needed to figure out the relationship between digital communications and Korea's democratic transformation in detail. In this context, fundamental questions about the relationship between digital communication and democracy are raised: "Does advanced digital technology affect society's democratic consolidation?" (Kim & Kim 2009: 56), if so, "Can digital communications enhance a certain type of democracy or democratic values?"

4.6. Conclusion

Through this chapter, it was identified that many internal and external factors influenced Korean digital society and democratic changes. By analysing the characteristics and historical experiences of Korea, this chapter suggested knowledge that is the basis for understanding the Korean digital societal contexts. During the last several decades, Korean politics has experienced dramatic changes, politically, economically, and historically. Passing the traditional media era, contemporary Korean politics has become increasingly digital-mediated, which transformed the political communication environment. However, it was identified that there are various issues in the democratic aspect of Korean digital society. Despite the positive perspectives of many observers on digital media's impacts on democratic societies, there are also various concerns that the compromising of democracy in society resulted from digital media communication.

Given these analyses to understand the establishment of the Korean digital society in the context of its democratisation, the next chapter, as a further step of an in-depth case study, will specifically investigate both the historical background of Korea's ICTs infrastructural developmental process and the Korean government's plans and strategies in the process of digital government development.

Chapter 5. How digital communications developed in Korea

5.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to understand the historical context of the Korean government's ICTs development and overall changes in the governmental communication systems through advanced digital technologies. To solve research question 1 "*How has Korea's digital communication changed over the last twenty-five years?*", this chapter examines the whole digital developmental process from the establishment of ICTs infrastructure to the operations of the digital government system in Korea. By observing a series of strategic digital initiatives that the government has created and implemented, it explains how the Korean digital communication systems changed as the government has changed over the last twenty-five years. More specifically, it distinguishes the external and internal reasons for the Korean government's decision to intensively focus on ICTs development. Furthermore, it analyses various success factors that affected the ICTs infrastructure establishment in Korea. Finally, based on the arguments, it examines how the government's digital adoption has influenced Korean society and its democracy. It includes discussions of the democratic implication of Korean governmental communications in contemporary Korean society.

5.2. Background of Korean ICTs development

The advanced digital development that proceeded over the previous decades has resulted in political, economic and socio-cultural implications in Korean society

(Vesikula 2013: 3). Korea's successful ICTs infrastructure establishment has affected the overall national development of Korea in diverse aspects. Through a series of digital developmental stages, Korea took the position of an ICTs powerhouse. Among many countries in the world, Korea has been regarded as the world leader in terms of digital development in various fields for the past couple of decades. To understand the whole developmental process of Korea, it is necessary to investigate first the background of the government's decisions and reasons why Korea focused on it. Given that, this section starts by examining external and internal factors that affected Korea's decision-making in terms of intensive ICTs development in the 1990s.

5.2.1. A global trend

In 1984, the minister Oh Myung who was the minister of the MOC stated, "Now a new wave of the information revolution is coming. If we cope with this information revolution wisely, we will be able to become a developed country in the upcoming information society and realise a welfare society. However, if we miss this wave, we will return to an eternal backward country of future society once again." According to a line written in the White Paper of Post Office, the Ministry of Communication [MOC] (1948-1994) and a successor to the Ministry of Information and Communication [MIC] (1994-2008), "The informatisation of the national society is not defined as a matter of choices that do or cannot be done, but a matter of adaption that is related to how to cope with this trend more efficiently than other countries."

In the late 1980s, many developed countries in the world such as the U.S., the UK and Singapore introduced the Information Super Highway (ISH), and many international Internet companies began to influence the global economy in earnest. At that time, some experts in Korea anticipated that the primary source of economic

development shortly would become ICTs. Korea actively focused on the development of ICTs and this global trend influenced various socio-economic aspects. By following the global trend, Korea actively took actions in order to enter the digital mediated global societies and achieve economic growth. Considering this, the global trend is regarded as one of the critical external factors for Korea's digital development.

In the 1990s, as the media environment across the world dramatically changed due to highly evolved digital technology, many developed countries actively began to move to sectors about information processing, and automation such as the computer industry (Lew 1999; Mo & Moon 1999: 154). The global trend of informatisation and digitalisation was prevalent over the developed countries from the early 1990s. Based on mobility and connectivity, globalisation on the virtual geography has influenced affiliation among local nations and their integration into a new world system. More specifically, the developed countries introduced digital mediated systems to diverse fields from private to public sectors, which quickly became a universal trend.

In this period, neo-liberalism was the prevailing global communication ideology in Korea. Based on this international ideology, ICTs were recognised as a means of national economic development by professionals and academics at that time. During the Kim Young-sam administration (1993-1998), the Korean government embraced the global trend of competition, deregulation, liberalisation, and privatisation as a matter of principle (Jin 2006: 5). Under the international economic pressures that come from a trade, Kim's administration decided to adopt the 'Segyehwa' that means 'globalisation' of Korea as a key political aim. The objective of this national scheme was to open Korea to the global market, by adopting a more outward-looking approach in its foreign policy (Jin 2006) and protect Korea from the severe economic competition (McClelland

et al. 1997). In this context, Evans (1995) indicates Korea as one of the typical developmental nations that established digital-mediated infrastructure.

5.2.2. Economic background of Korea

Korea's economy in the 1970s and 1980s was mainly based on light and heavy industries. Since Korea focused on exports of automobiles and textile goods, the Korean economy mainly rested on international trade. The 'developmental state' in Korea strategically utilised the comparative advantage of the country in terms of human resources to promote labour-intensive, mass-manufacturing industries for export-oriented economic (Ranjit 2015). However, as global economic competition became intense, and with China becoming a more potent export country occupying the same kind of industry market, Korea was unable to maintain a competitive position in the manufacturing industries and had to look for a breakthrough (Kim 2011). Thus, Kim Young-sam's administration had to find a way to escape from the export-oriented economy that used to be a leading market mechanism of the previous authoritarian regimes. In order to do this, Kim's government sought to find a new kind of source of profits for the local conglomerates and was forced to affiliate Korea with the global economy.

At that time, "Under the sway of expansionary market logic, digital technology began a political-economic transition towards "digital capitalism" in the late 1990s" (Schiller 1999). Digital networking infrastructure was regarded as an essential source of global economic power since it enables flows of digital properties influencing financial capital, electronic business data, and entertainment content (Lee 2012: 35). In this regard, many scholars in the world have developed an alternative interpretation of new phenomena in terms of digital-mediated global societies and economies, turning away

from the neo-classical, market-oriented perspectives and dependency theories. According to them, different new terms, such as “cybernetic capitalism” (Robins & Webster 1999), “digital capitalism” (Schiller 1999), and “fast capitalism” (Agger 2015), help explain the deepened reliance on the virtual dynamics of capitalism (Lee 2012: 35).

Given this global economic context, to survive in the global economy, Korea had to do something to improve the domestic infrastructure and extend its capacities to bring about a new, ICTs-driven market (Lee 2012: 89). Also, due to the severely competitive global economy, Korea had to reconstruct its economic strategies at that time (Lee 2003: 8). In this vein, the national construction of digital networks became appealing to the government as a measure of economic growth. Digital technologies as tools for a nation’s development could be regarded as an intentionally strategic plan for survival in digital capitalism era.

In particular, the Korean government needed to find a solution to the national economic crisis in 1997 and considered ICTs as a breakthrough in the Korean economy at that time by emphasising ‘knowledge-intensive, high-tech areas based on the wealthy human capital’ (Lee 2003: 13). Thus, the Korean government decided to establish an infrastructure to revive Korea’s economic growth in the new digital economy. The government more actively tried to shift the recessed economy towards a knowledge-based system. Considering this, Glassman (2013) argues, “In the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Korea looked at the ICTs as the most effective way to achieve economic recovery.” Besides, Lee (2003: 8) more determinately claims, “The main engine behind Korea's recovery from the 1997 crisis has been the advance in ICT.”

It can be said that survival in digital capitalism depends on local capabilities to operate digital networks as a part of the broader digital web of the global market. Considering the previous decisions conducted by the Korean government, it can be

assumed that the economic background of Korea was a key reason why Korea had to decide to execute intensive investment in ICTs development (Vesikula 2013: 4). In this regard, Lee (2003) more specifically explains Korea's ICT developmental process in terms of the economy.

“Korea's vitality as an ICT hotbed has resulted from some factors such as the changing global economic environment, government policies, and Korean cultural characteristics supporting ICT diffusion. The Korean government has made a bold investment in technological and human infrastructures. These factors have enabled Korea to establish new competitive strategies for high-tech areas, especially ICTs.” (Lee 2003: 7)

5.3. Korea's ICTs infrastructure establishment

Through the section above, it has been identified that from a macro perspective, global trend and economic background have had an overall impact on Korea' ICT development. In order to understand Korea's digital development in detail, from a more specific perspective, this section investigates the process of ICTs infrastructure establishment and its impacts on national development. To do this, it examines the process of Korea's ICT development at various perspectives, such as analyses of the ICTs' contribution to Korea's economic recovery and growth. In addition to this, it identifies a general evaluation of Korea's digital development by domestic and foreign observers, and at the same time, figures out limits in the further digital development that Korea has faced.

5.3.1. Background of the ICTs infrastructure establishment

Korea has continuously developed ICTs since the government started to use computers for data processing in 1967. However, it is regarded that the establishment of a full-fledged digital infrastructure took place in the early 1990s. Indeed, the Korean government started to take action to build an Information Super Highway (ISH) in 1993. The aim of establishing the Information Super Highway was to build a nation-wide information communication infrastructure to enable the universal use of broadband ICTs services (MOIS 2017: 30). The government's introduction of the Information Super Highway policy, which was benchmarked from the one introduced by the U.S., enabled Korea to become competitive among other countries. According to the National Informatisation White Paper, although Korea was late in the development of ICTs such as Internet technology, Digital Electronic Switching System called Time Division Exchange (TDX) and wireless telephony, it was the first to achieve commercialisation of it in the world.

“Commercialisation of Time Division Exchange (TDX) and wireless telephony was such an accomplishment made by some of civil servants and scientists, which is not well known to the public well. It was regarded as a part of good works done by the Kim Young-sam government.” (Lee, W. T., a senior researcher from the KISDI, 22 September 2017)

From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, digital communication spread throughout the world. In 1991, some developed countries began to use the World Wide Web, and the rest of the countries in the world had an Internet connection by 1999. Following this global trend, the government under the Kim Dae-jung regime (1998-2003) took various actions about informatisation in the late 1990s. In particular, the

Kim government achieved remarkable growth in terms of Internet penetration across the country and ICTs industry development. During this period, the government concentrated highly on the ICTs-related projects as it also considered ICTs as an engine of economic growth.

“In the early 2000s, based on Korea’s leading status in terms of ICT development, there was much foreign news anticipating the direction of the future global ICT trends around the world. When I was in the UK, I often heard on the BBC news that the Korean government was at the top of the world in establishing infrastructure for broadband network facilities. It was common in other countries to use the Internet using telephone lines, but at the same time, Korea started using LAN cables that are for Internet only. While the proportion of broadband network infrastructure completion in the UK was only 2 per cent, Korea at that time had reached over about 60 per cent. In the Kim Dae-jung regime, Korea was the No.1 country, followed by countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong and the Netherlands.” (Jeon, S. O., a senior civil servant from the MCST and a former civil servant from the GIA, 29 September 2017)

At the beginning of the digital developmental process, the Korean government played a leading role in establishing digital infrastructure by investing a large amount of budget on it. The government tried to learn how to create effective domestic digital networking to further futuristic state-guided developmental policy schemes. Also, the government enthusiastically tried to engage private sectors by promoting government plans in terms of informatisation and carried out the massive infrastructure projects continuously. As a consequence, the advancement in digital technology has brought

about a variety of implications over the past several decades (Vesikula 2013: 3) for the government's administrative, economic, and societal aspects.

5.3.2. The national economic achievements in terms of the ICTs

“ICTs has been a major pillar of the Korean economy and has helped elevate the country as one of the leading countries in today's global economy since the 1990s” (Vesikula 2013: 10-11). Apart from Vesikula, some other scholars also argue that Korea's economic growth resulted from ICTs. They more specifically maintain that ‘Korea's ICTs equipment and software contributed almost twice as much to the growth of labour productivity from 1995 to 2003 as compared with earlier decades from 1973 to 1995’ (Corrado et al. 2009; Corrado & Hulten 2010; Jung et al. 2013). In addition to this, according to the International comparison of knowledge economy data analysed by World Bank, Korea's ICT contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth amounted to 33 per cent in 1999 and 47 per cent in 2000. It belongs to the most rapidly and successfully changing economies, and this can be primarily attributed to extraordinary high scores in ICT-related indicators (Lee 2016). Furthermore, other various numerical data show that ICTs has occupied a significant proportion in Korea's GDP that proliferated in the early 2000s.

By 1998 the number of high-speed Internet subscribers in Korea was only 14,000. Most of the users were still reliant on Personal Computers (hereafter “PC”) communications over the phone line. It was a strange and challenging technology to use for the rest of the people. However, the penetration rate of high-speed Internet has increased explosively throughout the Kim government: the number of subscribers reached 10.4 million in 2002, which was seven-hundred times the previous data in 1998

(Hankyung.com, 18 August 2009¹⁹). In other words, there was one Internet line per household of four, which means that anyone could use the Internet easily at home if they had a computer.

As for the accomplishment of the national project, Morgan Stanley (2002) statistically and comparatively reported that 68 per cent of Korean households had broadband, and this figure was higher than other countries such as the US with 15 per cent, and 8 per cent in European nations (Kim 2006: 53). The OECD (2006)²⁰ also notes that the number of broadband subscribers per one hundred inhabitants reaches 26.4 in Korea while the UK and the US have 19.4 and 19.2 subscribers, respectively. In addition to this, according to the data below, showing the global Internet penetration rate in 2006 (**Figure 9**), Korea accounted for 70.5 per cent, ranking first among major countries.

Figure 9. Internet users and penetration in select countries worldwide in 2006

Internet Users and Penetration in Select Countries Worldwide, 2006		
	Internet users (millions)	Penetration (%)
US	181.9	63.6
China	133.5	10.2
Japan	87.2	68.4
Germany	39.4	47.8
UK	35.1	57.9
South Korea	34.4	70.5
France	28.7	47.1
Italy	28.6	49.2
India	25.5	2.3
Brazil	21.2	11.3
Canada	21.0	63.4
Mexico	20.0	18.6
Spain	16.5	40.8
Australia	13.1	64.5
Argentina	7.9	19.8
Rest of World	368.0	13.2
Worldwide	1,080.0	16.6

Note: eMarketer uses historical data from the International Telecommunication Union [ITU] as a baseline; penetration figures are based on population estimates from the US Census Bureau's International Data Base (IDB); an Internet user is defined as someone who uses the Internet at least once per month

Source: eMarketer (January 2007)

¹⁹ Lee, J. H. (2009). "The world most computer friendly country, IT powerhouse Korea" (in Korean) <http://news.hankyung.com/article/200908094699g>

²⁰OECD Broadband Statistics. (31 October 2006). http://www.oecd.org/document/9/0,2340,en_2649_34223_37529673_1_1_1_1,00.html

The establishment of a large community site accommodated dozens and millions of members, and various changes in terms of ICT development created new societal and economic values. With the widespread use of the Internet, new forms of industries such as PC rooms, ICT ventures and online games began to emerge. Korea has established itself as a global ICTs powerhouse by leading the development of the ICTs-based society (Milad 2013; Vesikula 2013: 10). Considering this, the outputs of the ICTs industry, measured by Internet diffusion, reached US\$ 169 billion in 2002, and the share of GDP also increased from 8.6 per cent in 1998 to 14.9 per cent in 2002. These figures are ahead of the U.S. (11.1 per cent) and Japan (9.6 per cent) in the same period (Hankyung.com, 18 August 2009²¹).

ICT industries contributed 41.9 per cent to Korean economy in 2003 and through ICT-related exports; Korea had profits of approximately US\$ 74.7 billion, which is 29.4 per cent of total exports in Korea. In this vein, Lee (2016) claims that the ICTs sector in Korea acted as the single most significant economic driver. More recently, based on the ICTs infrastructure, Korea expanded the range of exports by developing derivate products such as semiconductors, mobile phones, and digital television (TV). According to data from KISA (2017), some international organisations' recent ICTs-related data (**Figure 10**) demonstrate the overall progress of the Korean ICTs development even though WEF and IMD data show Korea's ICT-related national competitiveness is relatively lower than other figures.

²¹ Lee, J. H. (2009). "The world most computer friendly country, IT powerhouse Korea" (*in Korean*) <http://news.hankyung.com/article/200908094699g>

Figure 10. International index of the ICTs development in Korea

International index								
Organisations	Index	The Rank of Korea						
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
International Telecommunication Union [ITU]	ICT Development Index	1	1[152]	1[155]	2[157]	2[166]	1[167]	1[175]
World Intellectual Property Organisation [WIPO]	Among the global innovation index, ICT infrastructure (overall ranking)	20[20]	1[16]	1[21]	1[18]	1[16]	1[14]	
The World Economic Forum [WEF]	Network Readiness Index	15	10[138]	12[142]	11[144]	10[143]	12[143]	12[143]
	Among the national competitiveness index,	19[22]	18[142]	18[144]	22[148]	25[144]	27[140]	27[140]
International Institute for Management Development [IMD]	World Competitiveness Evaluation Medium Technology Infrastructure (Overall ranking)	18[23]	14[59]	14[59]	11[60]	8[60]	13[61]	13[61]
United Nations [UN]	E-Government Development Index	1	-	1[193]	-	1[193]	-	-
	Online participation index	1	-	1	-	1	-	-
Waseda University in Japan	World e-government rankings	7	4	3	4	3	5	5
Economist Intelligence Unit [EIU]	IT industry competitiveness index	-	19	-	-	-	-	-
	Government Broadband Index	-	1	2	-	-	-	-
Oxford University [UK]	Broadband Internet Quality Research	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication [Japan]	Competitiveness of ICT	1	1	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Korea Internet and Security Agency [KISA] (2017)

Given this evidence, it can be assumed that Korea's ICTs development considerably affected Korea's economy and national development in many ways. Today, knowledge and information products and services based on advanced ICTs still play a considerably important role in the Korean economy.

5.3.3. Evaluations of Korea's ICTs Development

Many observers have evaluated the broadband infrastructure-driven ICTs growth in Korea as one of the most remarkable government-led projects of modern times (Lee 2012). The Guardian (2003) described the Korean government's circumstance at that time as "The South Korean government's recognition of the ever-increasing need to build a network society to prepare for the coming information age" (Watts 2006). In this context, Lee (2003) argues, "Korea's experience shows how information and communications technology can be used for national development."

Fortune magazine also appraised Korea as ‘leapfrogging the US to become the planet’s pacesetter in the high-speed Internet’ (Lewis 2004).

The Economist Intelligence Unit (2011)²² explained that Korea at the top of other developed countries set to benefit from the rollout of improved ICTs infrastructure. In addition to this, the International Telecommunication Union [ITU] (2011)²³ has shown that Korea sharply moved into the first tier of information wealth within a relatively short period (Lee 2012). The New York Times introduced Korean society as the realisation of ‘America’s broadband dream’ (Belson & Richtel 2003). These compliments can prove that the Korean government has succeeded in getting high appraisals from many other nations (Lee 2012: 1). Above all, Korea’s successful establishing of ICTs infrastructure is meaningful in that it provided Korea with a basis of further development towards a digital society.

However, despite these positive evaluations by the foreign press, Lee (2012: 3-5) argues that the Korean digital development plans have a “Janus-faced nature”. He also claims that “Many scholars ignored the government’s attempts at hyper-panoptic social control, the vulnerable condition of digital human rights, the chronic cronyism between the state and the conglomerates, the rise of digital activism against the neo-authoritarian civilian government, and other realistic conditions of a neo-liberal market state” (ibid). Besides, some of Korea’s limitations in the development of ICTs have also been revealed during the developmental process.

Despite the high level of ICTs and robust infrastructure, Korea found it difficult to grow in the global market because of three reasons: (1) the small size of the domestic market, (2) the lack of technology and (3) language barriers. While Korea’s ICTs hardware exports have been very successful, software exports were not quite so

²² http://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=broadbandMay2011

²³ Measuring the Information Society (2011) <http://www.itu.int/pub/D-IND-ICTOI-2011>

successful, except for the online gaming industry. Korea's marketability was too small to develop a global service. Fundamentally, it was challenging for Korea to grow with its basic technology and resources since it used the Operating Systems (OS) made in foreign countries, such as Microsoft. Also, as many Korean's do not use English, only using their native language, there was a limit to the enlargement of the range of software that could be sold in global markets. Therefore, for sustained economic growth, it was difficult to objectively consider Korea as a competitive country in the global market. Nevertheless, the Korean government tried to become a testing board through online services overcoming the weakness that the domestic market is small.

“In fact, digital press such as ‘Ohmynews’ and ‘Pressian’ and a social network platform such as ‘Cyworld’ were experimentally made first in Korea. The Internet news media such as ‘Huffington Post’ in the US was a similar form of the online press in Korea. Moreover, the social networking function of ‘Facebook’ made in 2004 can also be found in ‘Cyworld’ that had already been boomed in Korea in the very early 2000s. Although it seems that Korea was the pioneer in the online market, it could not achieve great success worldwide because of a language barrier.” (Jeon, S. O., a senior civil servant from the MCST and a former civil servant from the GIA, 29 September 2017)

5.4. Success factors of Korea's ICTs infrastructure establishment

Among many democratic countries, Korea is one of the notable nations that can provide insights on how to accomplish extreme success in digital development (Frieden 2005: 603). For this reason, many scholars have analysed the success factors of Korea's ICTs development in various aspects (see, Lee 2003; Lee et al. 2003; Choudrie & Lee

2004; Yoon & Chae 2009; Oh & Larson 2011; Hong et al. 2016; Lee 2016). According to them, Korean society has some unique success features that affected establishing and improving the digital society, distinguishing them from other countries. There are various external and internal factors of multiple players in Korea's success in establishing the ICTs infrastructure in their discussions. Among them, four main features explain the successful ICTs development in Korea: (1) Government's strong leadership (2) Intensive investment (3) Public-Private Partnership (PPP) and strategic policy execution and (4) Specific socio-economic background.

5.4.1. Government's strong leadership

In general, the governments' initiatives have an important meaning in that they play a role as a system of principles to control decisions and outcome. The different policies and systems applied to societies can make a big difference to the national development of a country. Regarding this, Clift (2004: 37) argues that 'new leaders often shift their political priorities and approaches'. Given that, it can be assumed that Korean political circumstances have changed depending on the different political period under the varying political leaders of Korea. Regarding this, the leading role of the Korean government in various ways played a significant role in transforming Korea into a digital society.

Korea can be regarded as a representative case of 'government-led model', which is regarded as a significant feature, which led to the success of Korea as a digital society. The Korean government had a strong will to spread ICTs in order to build a stable country with a knowledge-based economy. Thus, it strategically executed policies with robust leadership. By establishing and operating governmental agencies in charge of ICTs plans, the government played a leading role in implementing ICTs

development plans. In this regard, some scholars emphasise that the role of the government in establishing ICTs infrastructure cannot be ignored in the case of Korea. Lee (2003) claims, “The Korean government has played the central role in shaping the current status of Korean ICTs.” Furthermore, Larson and Park (2014: 357) maintain, “Korea’s experience suggests a crucial role for a control tower, understood as a high-level government body responsible for industrial policy involving the ICTs sector and science in the network era.”

Both Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung governments in the 1990s tried to change the national economic route from a labour-intensive economy to a ‘knowledge-based economy (or society)’. At the same time, they regarded globalisation as the foremost goals of the nation’s affairs (Lee 2012: 54). In this regard, the Ministry of Information and Communication [MIC] (1994-2008) officially recorded ‘The government’s strong leadership and policies for the development of ICTs infrastructure’ on the list of success factors. When the concept of a ‘knowledge-based society’ was widespread over the world in the late 1990s, although many intellectuals in Korea emphasised the concept, the ordinary people in Korea did not know much about it.

In this context, President Kim Dae-jung is particularly evaluated to be a national leader who was well aware of the concept of the ‘knowledge-based society’ in a macroscopic framework and applied it to set related policies. It is regarded that Kim’s government achieved remarkable growth in terms of Internet penetration rate and ICT industry during his regime. According to Seo Sam-Young, the previous president of the National Computerisation Agency [NCA], “President Kim Dae-jung mentioned that he

would like to be recorded as a president who opened the knowledge and information society” (Asian Economic, 18 August 2009²⁴).

“For the second nation-building, we will focus on establishing a knowledge-based economy where information and leading technology play a central role.”
(Address by President Kim Dae-jung commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Republic of Korea, 15 August 1998)

In the year 1998, with the inauguration of the Kim Dae-jung administration, the official government webpage appeared, and Internet-based civil services were provided to the public. Moreover, during his regime period, distribution of PC started in earnest, and the ICT venture enterprise fever started to explode. In this sense, President Kim is still particularly regarded as a significant figure in terms of ICTs development among a few leaders in Korea.

“I worked at Cheong Wa Dae [Blue House] during the Kim Dae-jung government. The Kim administration started in a situation that had to overcome the economic crisis. I think that President Kim personally understood and accepted the opinions of future scholars such as Elvin Toffler, and reflected his thought based on these ideas into policies. President Kim felt the limitations of the existing industrial structure and tried to lead economic stimulation by integrating information and communication as a new growth engine into the industry. ICT industries had become a big deal at this time, and fostering industries in this field were booming.” (Lyn, B. T., a previous civil servant from the GIA, 26 September 2017)

²⁴ Kim, J. O. (2009). “[Former President Kim’s death] Kim Dae-jung government established IT Powerhouse in Korea” (in Korean)
<http://www.asiae.co.kr/news/view.htm?idxno=2009081814282226848>

“Admittedly, his staffs assisted him by suggesting policies. However, a more important fact is that President Kim himself was able to analyse the global trends and reflect them in the policies he made. ‘The Third Wave’ was already a best seller all over the world, but Korea was the fastest country to apply the ‘Information Revolution’ from this book to national policies. I believe that even if there had not been an economic crisis, it would have still been possible because Kim understood the global trends leading to the ‘information age’.”
(Jeon, S. O., a senior civil servant from the MCST and a former civil servant from the GIA, 29 September 2017)

Meanwhile, by establishing an independent organisation at the early stage, the Korean governments intended to carry out the related projects efficiently. The existence of an independent governmental agency was a way to enhance government authority in order to control the ICTs related business. In this vein, since the election of President Kim Young-sam in 1992, the government enlarged and strengthened the authority of an independent organisation for ICTs, the Ministry of Information and Communication [MIC] (1994-2008), which used to be the Post Offices and the Ministry of Communication [MOC] (1948-1994).

According to Larson and Park (2014: 352), the government’s structural reforms in 1995, which took place against a backdrop of the growing power of private companies concerning the government, formalised the role of the MIC as a control tower for ICTs sector policy. The MIC acted as a head office in ICT fields and contributed to the enormous development in that field by playing a director role. It also played a pivotal role in integrating the information and communication tasks that had previously been handled by various individual ministries in Korea. The MIC was

dedicated to making policies on informatisation, and information and communication. Up until its abolition in 2008, it had played ‘a key role in transforming Korea into the powerhouse of information and communication as it is today’ (MOIS 2017: 44).

In addition to this, apart from operating an independent organisation, the government exerted strong leadership by creating and executing policies. When it comes to Korean ICTs development, the government acted as a pivotal role in making decisions and creating and applying policies related to from ICTs infrastructure establishment to its common use in Korean society. It was a priority for the governments at the early stage of ICTs development to build infrastructure first to guarantee the people’s access to the Internet for universal use. Thus, in order to promote widespread Internet use, the government introduced a flat-rate system, rather than a meter-rate system. Regarding this, Choudrie and Lee (2004: 112) pointed out that the Korean government encouraged the public to access the high-speed Internet by offering an affordable price rate to the public. As a result, the users’ accessibility could be enhanced, and the economic policy in terms of ICTs made them able to acquire a considerable amount of information with a relatively small amount of payment.

“In 1984, Korea became the second country in Asia, following Japan, to establish a packet-switching public communication network dedicated to data communication. Despite this groundbreaking step, Korea’s public communication network was expensive and had very limited coverage. However, in the late 1990s, with the emergence of high-speed Internet services using ADSL and cable modems, low-cost Internet connections with high-speed became available.” (MOIS 2017: 29)

Considering the government's leadership in establishing the digital society, according to interview with Lee, W. T. (22 September 2017) who is one of the Korean experts in this field below, it seems still controversial about the range of the government's role and its contributions to overall social development. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the Korean government's leading role was significantly effective in that the range of the government's role in digital development in Korea was broad, from the national infrastructure establishment to implementing appropriate policies. Furthermore, it is also true that based on the national digital-based networks, the Korean government enhanced the public's convenience and improved industrial competitiveness. In this vein, Lee (2012: 43, 103) argues that Korean society could enter into a new phase of digital-oriented development due to the government-led instalment of high-speed ICTs backbone infrastructures.

“The government and the public sector have played a key role in the development of ICTs in Korea. Considering this, while some scholars point out that it is a government-led industrialisation policy, others argue that it was possible by the unseen force of the digital market. According to the latter's' arguments, the government only played a role in constructing infrastructure such as laying the net all over the country.” (Lee, W. T., a senior researcher from the KISDI, 22 September 2017)

5.4.2. Strategic intensive investment

With strong leadership, the Korean government planned concrete schemes and strived to promote government-led ICTs projects. The government invested in establishing digital infrastructure and fostering related industries in various ways.

However, although the government began to establish Information Super Highway for the public communication network in 1984, the financial difficulties prevented the project processing. To solve these problems, the government proposed the slogan “Investment First, Settlement Later” (MOIS 2017: 19-24). Based on this slogan, at the early stage of infrastructure establishment, the government invested public funds of US\$ 6.2 billion for about eleven years, with the expenditure of US\$16.5 billion from the private sector in order to build a nationwide Information Super Highway based on the lines of the U.S. National Information Infrastructure.

“Given the nation’s economic difficulties at that time, investing the government’s financial resources in the computerisation of administrative work was a radically innovative idea. In hindsight, this investment was the cornerstone for the computerisation of government tasks, eventually laying the foundation for Korea to become one of the top e-government leaders.” (MOIS 2017: 17)

Under the ambitious slogan, the government also induced funds from the private sector. The government intended to have the private sector participate in the investment, and thus, some large corporations invested a large amount of money into the project, such as Korean Telecom Corporation. In this context, Lee (2016: 3) maintains, “The Informatisation Promotion Fund [IPF] (1996) created the system of letting the profits from ICTs fields be reallocated into ICTs sector and enabled focused investment in ICTs.” In addition to this, according to Lim (2010), the government not only made a massive investment in ICTs infrastructure but also provide generous Research and Development (R&D) support.

“Information and Communication Promotion Fund to support R&D concerning information and communication were secured in the late 1990s. Based on this fund, there was a sort of boom in the ICTs industries.” (Song, K. J., an academic, 22 September 2017)

It can be said that through the funds from the private sector, as well as government resources, the government was able to take the necessary actions for a push-start in ICTs. In particular, due to the government’s intensive investment and concentrated development strategies, significant progress had been made in the index of ICTs development in Korea, particularly from 1997 to 2001 (**Figure 11**). The government’s intensive investment plan was continuous, and it obtained an international reputation as a global powerhouse of ICTs in the late 1990s (MOIS 2017: 29).

Figure 11. The changed landscape of the Korean ICT industry from 1997 to 2001

(Korean Population: 47.3 million as of December 2001)

	Sector	1997	2001
Informatisation Index	High-speed Internet subscribers (million)	1.4	7.8
	Internet users (million)	1.6	24.4
	PCs in use (million)	6.9	20.7
	Wired telephone subscribers (million)	20.4	22.7
	Mobile telephone subscriber (million)	6.9	29.1
ICT Industry Index	Production value (\$ billion)	62.9	125.0
	ICT value added (\$ billion)	32.6	58.7
	Portion of GDP (%)	8.6	13.4
	ICT export (\$ billion)	31.3	38.4
	ICT trade balance (\$ billion)	9.4	10.6
	ICT industry employees (thousand)	560	1.163
	ICT firms	9.397	17.719
	ICT venture firms	636	5.073

Source: Minister’s report, “IT policy direction for building IT-led country”, KMIC, 11 October 2002; mid-to-long-term market overview for the information communications industry (2002-2006) (February 2002), Korea Information Society Development Institute cited by Lee (2003: 10)

In the meantime, the government aimed to realise an information society to the extent of developed countries by the 2000s. To accomplish this objective, the government continuously and intensively invested in ICTs development by spending a large amount of the national budget and properly using public and private sectors' funds. Regarding this, Kim et al. (2004: 4) report that "The government invested more than 0.25 per cent of the GDP in building a high-speed Internet backbone and provided more than 0.2 per cent of GDP in soft loans to operators from 1999 to 2005.

"The practical driver for a massive investment of the government in the development of ICTs was a prevalent idea in the previous society that we should become a leading country in informatisation age." (Um, M. J., a senior researcher from the STEPI, 11 September 2017)

"When I was in the Ministry of Information and Communication [MIC], the government heavily invested in ICTs industries. Its aftermath has affected our society until now. I believe the role of government was important, and intensive investment also played a key role to establish ICTs infrastructure. In this sense, the effect of the initial intensive investment of the government is quite obvious." (Song, B. C., a senior civil servant from the MOSF, 21 September 2017)

Considering this, Vesikula (2013: 4) argues, "It is without a doubt that the success and strength of the ICTs sector in Korea were due to the immense government spending on until 2005." Consequently, it can be said that the focused financing strategy executed by the government played a role as the engine for Korea's success in the ICTs sector. In short, the Korean government-led massive investment in ICT fields led to an evident result that Korea became one of the leading countries among many digital societies.

5.4.3. Public-Private Partnership (PPP)

Public-Private Partnership (hereafter “PPP”) is regarded as one of the success factors in explaining Korea’s ICTs development. As mentioned above, the range of government work encompassed not only implementation of the projects to network public sectors but also the promotion of informatisation to lead to demand for high-speed Internet (Larson & Park 2014: 346, 352). In this context, to conduct the long-standing and large-scale construction of digital networks, the Korean government needed a stable and sufficient financial aid and the cooperation of multiple sectors (Larson & Park 2014: 349). Thus, the government relied on the private sectors, along with the impact of the public-private cooperation on the entire ICTs sector.

The government played a role as a facilitator that encouraged private companies to enter the broadband market (Choudrie & Lee 2004: 111). At that time, the MIC conducted various national projects in relation to the ICT fields at the government level. At the early developmental stage, the large corporations in Korea mainly took over the government-led ICTs-related businesses. Regarding this, Lim (2010) argues, “While the division of labour between the government and the private sector has changed, joint discovery and upgrading of comparative advantage have continued to operate as a fundamental development principle for Korea.” Also, the government recruited many experts in relevant fields from the private sector who were not considered technocrats upon recruitment (Larson & Park 2014: 357).

In particular, the leaders of the MIC, which was a control tower in Korea, were from big private companies such as Samsung and Korea Telecom [KT]. It naturally affected the formation of professional leadership in the governmental ICTs affairs and enhanced the relationship with private sectors. In this vein, there have been reasonable doubts about whether or not the government intentionally gave advantages to those big

companies. Considering the history of Korea's development as a digital society, it seems that there have been unique connections between the government and the large corporations. It may have been due to concerns of a symbiotic relationship between the political power and Chaebols, which has been continuous since the authoritarian governments. Regarding this, one of the senior civil servants explains this issue from the government's perspective below.

“In the early days, there were not many competitive companies in the ICTs field. Furthermore, because the MIC conducted project-oriented businesses, relatively large conglomerates were more competitive than other small companies, and therefore perhaps could have been indirectly affected. Unlike small companies, large conglomerates could take over these businesses. It was just because only limited numbers of large companies were capable of taking on the large-scale government business at that time. Thus, since there was no leading company in the field at that time, and therefore, it is difficult to say that the government directly gave large corporates advantages.” (Song, B. C., a senior civil servant from the MOSF, 21 September 2017)

Despite the existence of these concerns, the Korean government's policies that led to cooperation with the public and private sectors are generally evaluated as a successful strategy by many experts. In particular, Larson and Park (2014: 350) evaluate that an important perspective on the nature of public-private interaction in ICTs-led development is considered as crucial policy choices that shaped the ICTs sector in Korea. Furthermore, Wilson (2004: 39) maintains that the Korean government adopted 'suitable consideration of the policy balance between public and private

initiatives which featured a growing role for Korea's Chaebol business conglomerates in its ICTs sector' (Larson & Park 2014: 345).

Regarding this, Lee (2003) also agreed to these ideas by mentioning that "The concerted public-private partnership has enabled Korea to leapfrog many advanced countries in terms of wide diffusion and use of the most advanced ICTs." Considering these scholars' opinions, during the process of ICTs development, it seems evident that the government encouraged public and private sectors to co-operate with the government in accomplishing its ICTs objectives and the relationship with the large corporations in Korea played an important role.

5.4.4. Specific socio-economic circumstance

Liberalisation in the information and telecommunications market began at the end of the 1990s, introducing many external technologies and corresponding technologies to privatisation. While previous government-led industrialisation was closed and nationalistic, it cannot help opening the market after the economic crisis. The information and ICT markets were also not exceptions. In other words, since neo-liberalism was prevalent in economic policies, the ICT industries were also inevitably influenced, and has resulted in the growth of the new ICTs-related economic market, and contributed to shifting overall market conditions to a new economic system (Lee 2012: 47). In this vein, it can be said that the strategy of economic development in the late 1990s is similar to that of the modern mercantilist industrialisation in the past, except for one thing the fact that the key element of industrial development is ICTs.

In particular, the economic crisis in 1997, which profoundly affected not only socio-political but also the economy, is considered a decisive turning point of Korea. In fact, during the financial crisis of 1997, the surplus manpower, including those who had

been dismissed from their existing jobs due to the financial crisis became naturally interested in the new job market. Furthermore, the government tried to create a new job market and provide Korean labours with new skills focused on information technology. The government also actively supported venture companies by providing Internet access and training to manipulate computers and the Internet (Haube & Markoff 2005: 3). Thus, ICT companies such as Daum, Naver and Nexon that were major ones in Korea could secure a pool of human resources without difficulties.

“Continued support from the government and investments made by young graduate students in ICTs-projects led to the ICTs becoming the primary industry of the nation and the basis for future economic strategies (Lee et al. 2011) ... The Korean ICTs infrastructure is the most advanced in the world, and it owes a lot of its success to the contrast inflow of foreign funds and its highly skilled and motivated workforce.” (Vesikula 2013: 4)

During this early stage of digital development, one of the most significant achievements on the government’s side was administrative computerisation. By hiring highly educated young people who were surplus human resources at that time, the government could implement computerisation of administrative tasks such as resident registration. Those workforces would have been employed large companies or major banks for public affairs under the usual economic situation, but it was not that situation due to the economic crisis. Thus, due to the computerisation of enormous amount of data, present-day Koreans can access a wide range of digitalised information and receive various online services through login with their resident registration number, while the people of other countries have to do it through their email addresses.

“If it were under normal economic circumstances in Korea in the late 1990s, the people who were high-skilled and well educated would not usually have been interested in such simple administrative work.” (Lee, W. T., a senior researcher from the KISDI, 22 September 2017)

Considering this, it can be said that the unique economic situation in Korea brought about an unintentional positive societal effect. However, in this regard, there is also a critical point of view on the result of the considerable government-led supports for the National Data Base (hereafter “DB”) business. Although it is admitted that there are diverse benefits at the national level from them such as administrative efficiency or expanded accessibilities to the public information and services, it is criticised that the government at that time had processed the digitalisation without a concrete goal of the government’s business.

“The practical driver for a massive investment of the government in the development of ICTs was a prevalent idea in the previous society that we should become a leading country in ‘Informatisation’. However, DB service itself was the purpose, and there was not sufficient consideration of the post-effects of it. As a result, many DB with unclear direction were enormously created, and they were hardly used. The practical effects of encouraging public participation were not evaluated well.” (Um, M. J., a senior researcher from the STEPI, 22 September 2017)

Nevertheless, the fact the Korean society obtained diverse societal as well as economic benefits thanks to the successful establishment of the ICTs infrastructure seems to overwhelm this kind of criticism. The developed ICTs contributed to Korea’s overall economic growth by providing Korea with a new opportunity to recover from

the economic crisis by increasing exports and creating jobs. Furthermore, widespread access to high-speed Internet for the people contributed to changes in Korean society in many shapes. Given that, it can be considered that these economic benefits could be the reason why Koreans focused on and quickly exploited ICTs (Vesikula 2013: 11).

5.5. Korea's e-government plans

While the changes and development of Korean politics lag behind those in Korean economy during the last few decades, the public administration sector was continuously transformed due to digital development (Park et al. 2012: 104). In each regime, the government set concrete short-term and long-term plans fitting each developmental stage. It can be said that the Korean government's efforts paved the way for the efficient and far-reaching implementation of Korea's developed informatisation policies. Furthermore, the Korean government enhanced digital government system continuously, and it seems to have led to various national benefits both economically and socially. In this regard, this section more specifically analyses the government's ICTs development plans from the early 1990s to the mid-2010s and the introduction of e-government in Korea.

5.5.1. The Korean Information Infrastructure (KII)

Due to the constant efforts at the national level, such as the pro-ICTs policy led by the government, Korea could achieve remarkable growth in constructing a digitally networked society as well as the nationwide backbone network. With the introduction of computers in 1967, Korea's digital government project started as part of the office automation efforts for statistical analysis. Since the Korean government first introduced

computers, it has continuously conducted relevant research and made development efforts. It has substantial historical implications since it served as a gateway towards the contemporary digital government era (National Computerisation Agency [NCA] 2005).

When it comes to digital development, all the civilian administrations since Kim Young-sam regime sought to show their achievements from efforts in terms of digital government to the public within their term (Lee 2012: 107). The Korean government implemented a master plan by imitating the U.S. National Information Initiatives (NII)²⁵, the product of the High-Performance Computing Act of 1991, in setting and implementing the Korean Information Infrastructure Initiative (KII) (1995-2005). More precisely, the Korean government's KII project was modelled on the U.S. plans in 1993 and was evolved by the "Pilot Model" in Japan and the EU's "Euro-ISDN" in 1994 (Lee 2012).

However, the U.S. model of the ICTs plan was quite different from Korea's one, which was based on a "centric" model, in that its ICTs infrastructure has been developed in a decentralised way (Lee 2012: 2). The Korean government established the KII, whose sole purpose was to advance the nation's ICTs infrastructure (Lee et al. 2011). During the process of the project implementation, while the Korean government played the leading role, the U.S. case was led by the private sector. In this vein, the KII project can be regarded as a newer developmental state model in that it tends to have more collaborative features between the government and the private sector (Lee 2012: 76).

Ultimately, the government aimed to establish a nationwide high-speed backbone network to form 'the nation's ICTs infrastructure (Lee et al. 2011)'. In this

²⁵ It proposed to build communication networks, interactive services, interoperable computer hardware and software, computers, databases, and consumer electronics in order to put vast amounts of information available to both public and private sectors.

vein, Kim Young-sam administration considered the KII project as a potent engine to drive Korea's economic structure towards the knowledge-based economy (Lee 2009: 9). Through this project, the government sought to firmly integrate Korea into the world ICT economies as a way of surviving the market competition of the new world order of capitalism (Lee 2012: 2-3). As part of this, the government also enacted the Basic Informatisation Promotion Act to lead to an economic revitalisation of the Internet retail markets. In this vein, the ICTs industry in Korea gradually grew from 8.6 per cent of GDP in 1997 to 13 per cent in 2000, 13.4 per cent in 2001 (Lee 2003) and 14.9 per cent in 2002 (Hankyung.com, 18 August 2009²⁶), which was the highest proportion among OECD countries (the Korea Information Society Development Institute [KISDI] 2002) (Choudrie & Lee 2004: 105).

The KII project was designed for building a nationwide ICTs infrastructure to enable the widespread use of broadband services such as remote education and telecommuting (MOIS 2017: 30). The primary objective of the KII project was to enhance inter-connectivity of the nation through a high-speed broadband network and provide a network linking to public institutions, universities and research institutions, the private sector and individual households (Kim 2006: 53). According to Lee's examination titled "ICTs Development in Korea" (2012), the government outlined the "Basic Plan for the KII" (No. 93100-452, 1993), and announced the "Master Plan for the KII" (MOC 1994), which was to be implemented in three different phases: the KII-Government (KII-G), KII-Public (KII-P), and KII-Testbed (KII-T or KOREAN- the Korea Advanced Research Network).

The implementation of the KII project can be considered as a means of digital governance as well as promoting ICT business. In particular, unlike the other schemes,

²⁶ Lee, J. H. (2009). "The world most computer friendly country, IT powerhouse Korea" (*in Korean*) <http://news.hankyung.com/article/200908094699g>

KII-G was developed in three phases, shifting of specific policy goals. The first phase of building a backbone network (1995-1997) aimed at improving network connectivity among government agencies. At this stage, the government first enhanced the intelligence and police network lines and the optical networks interlinking these 4,000 agencies with a total investment of US\$163 million. It provided network services to 15,000 public institutions at a 40-50 per cent cheaper rate than ones that private broadband providers provided (MOIS 2017: 30).

In the second phase of backbone network completion (1998-2000), the nationwide optical infrastructure network was established to expand the range of network services. The third phase (2001-2005) was regarded as an expansion or advancement of the second phase. In this stage, 32,000 public institutions were able to access the nationwide broadband services in September 2005 (NCA 2006: 68-107; Lee 2012: 45-48).

“From 1996 to 2005, the KII project expanded the network subscribers 19 times and remarkably increased network speed. This served as the basic infrastructure for Korea’s current e-government.” (MOIS 2017: 30)

The KII-G is to connect all government agencies, local governments, and public institutions. It is a nationwide backbone network interconnecting over 30,000 public administration and agencies. “The KII project has been highly praised as a successful policy experiment by government officials, policymakers, scholars, and journalists from foreign countries, who focus on Korea’s attainment of broadband heaven through vigorous state leadership and corporate cooperation” (Lee 2009: 9). In this vein, the KII project can be regarded as a basis for the present technological advancement and digital

network environment in Korea as well as a starting point for the development of the Korean 'e-government'.

5.5.2. The emergence of e-government in Korea

Around the mid-1990s, many developed nations introduced digital government systems, electronic government system called e-government, for some crucial reasons such as the efficiency of the administrative system and the quality of public service. Ever since the Bill Clinton administration in the U.S. first used the term 'e-government' in 1993, it has been accepted worldwide. Turning to the late 1990s, as extensive political usage of ICTs around the world, the concept of e-government began to spread in the world. Indeed, it can be said that e-government has been regarded as an important strategic requirement for information and knowledge-oriented society in the 21st century (Accenture 2001; Deloitte Consulting 2001; Gartner Research 2002; Chung 2015).

The concept of e-government as a governmental communication tool can be defined in different ways depending on diverse perspectives. There are a variety of definitions and opinions of e-government across the world as many scholars in different fields have undertaken studies on it. There is no single definition of e-government that has broad acceptance (Kim & Kim 2003: 361). In this regard, the U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO] (1999) defines e-government as a government's use of technology, mainly web-based Internet applications, to enhance access to and delivery of government information and services to citizens and government entities. It is the practical realisation of the best that that government has to offer (the United Nations [UN] & the American Society for Public Administration [ASPA] 2001).

Although the definitions of e-government vary depending on the case, people in diverse fields generally agree with the idea that the e-government system has many positive values such as political effectiveness, administration efficiency, public service quality and governmental system structure transformation. In this vein, Carter and Weerakkody (2008) argue that digital government diffusion became an international phenomenon at that time and Korea was also following this spreading trend internationally. The Korean government in the late 1990s made the ICT development plans concrete, and actively promoted the innovation of electronic administration systems by providing online civil service to the public. Furthermore, the Korean government's digital media use for administration has been conspicuous since that time.

“The vision and strategy of e-government in 1998 by the Ministry was officially adopted as a part of national informatisation policy. It defined e-government as the use of information technology to transform the government to enable citizens and businesses easier and faster access to a variety of information and services and to increase the productivity and effectiveness of administration and policy at the same time, thereby leading informatisation and knowledge based-society.”
(MOIS 2017: 48)

During the Kim Dae-jung administration in the late 1990s, e-government plans were continuously emphasised by the government. The government enacted the “e-government Act” for the first time in the world in early 2001 (MOIS 2017; Lee et al. 2005: 103). In 2002, with the rapid spreading of access to the Internet, the government launched the e-government portal²⁷, which was the primary contact point between citizens and the government. Furthermore, as part of the government's efforts to find a

²⁷ www.egov.go.kr

competitive edge in e-government, the government established the special e-government committee (MOIS 2017: 99) to promote interagency collaboration in negotiating issues concerning the e-government initiatives in 2003 (Chung 2015).

5.5.3. The period of e-government maturity in Korea

At the end of the Kim Dae-jung regime, the government introduced the Government for Citizens portal (G4C), which was based on a civil service model that encouraged the people to share government information freely. Through a government's official portal site²⁸, the people could share and use governmental information such as guidance on civil affairs and petitions. These government's plans and initiatives enabled the present Koreans to be provided with the government's digital services everywhere for their daily activities (Lee 2003). Due to the enhanced public service delivery environment resulting from advanced digital technology, people in Korea tend to expect more efficient and public-oriented service delivery from the government.

Turning to President Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) who was the successor after President Kim Dae-jung, the government mainly concentrated on promoting the ICTs-based development of the entire Korean society. During that time, the government designated the e-government projects as the presidential agenda. As a part of government innovation, it invested a massive budget and human resources on e-government. The government ambitiously announced a specific vision and direction of the Korean e-government, which aimed to become the world's best open e-government. It was based on the "e-government Roadmap" divided into four different areas: increasing digital public services to 85 per cent, raising the world rank to the top 10 for

²⁸ www.egov.go.kr

business support competitiveness, reducing visits for civil service applicants to 3 visits per year and raising the utilisation rate of e-government programs to 60 per cent (Cho 2016).

In this vein, the Roh administration also declared that it had to ‘create a smart government structure with high transparency and productivity.’ The “Broadband ICTs Korea Vision 2007 (BK07)” was issued in December of 2003, which emphasised the ICTs role as the economic role for national wealth. Furthermore, these concrete plans and objectives of the government in terms of ICTs affected raising the yearly salary to US\$ 2 million per capita in Korea.

“I will promote the continued expansion of the infrastructure for a knowledge and information society and cultivate new industries.” (Address by President Roh Moo-hyun, 25 February 2008)

By implementing several policy plans in terms of utilising digital technologies, the Roh government tried to encourage Korean society to become a global leader e-Korea” (the Ministry of Information and Communication [MIC] & the National Computerisation Agency [NCA] 2005:100-104). The MIC introduced its market-driven policy plan, the “e-Korea Vision 2006”. Its primary goal was not only to promote the “information society” at the national level but also to obtain ‘strong ties of international cooperation with the global information society’ (NCA 2003: 10). In particular, the MIC (2007) specifically stressed Korea’s geopolitical standing point as “the electronic hub for the East Asian Countries” (Lee 2009: 19). To achieve this goal, the government began to outline infrastructure plans for the next generation by advancing the private networking sectors (Lee 2012: 99-104). Through the development of digital technologies and its applications, the previous civilian governments tried to improve the

domestic political and economic situation and to enhance its global status in order to become favourable to the world market.

Based on the digital infrastructure, the government under President Roh, with a slogan was ‘participatory government’, particularly paid more attention to interaction with the people by using email and digital government systems. The Roh government specifically focused on setting up concrete e-government strategies, and the strategies were based on three different objectives: (1) It aimed to develop a networked government by expanding government services and improve the quality of services for the people. (2) It aimed to become a knowledge government through greater administrative transparency and responsibility. In order to realise this goal, the government expanded the range of public disclosure and sharing about administrative information owned by the government. (3) It fundamentally tried to realise a ‘participatory government’, which involves citizens’ sovereignty and participation in national government affairs, presentations of opinions and receiving feedback’ (MOIS 2017: 63-64).

During this early e-government age, by experiencing the government’s digital services, the people’s demands for better communication with the government were increased. To meet the publics’ needs, the government carried out online participation services by introducing the 31 e-government roadmap projects in 2003. From 2004 to 2007, e-participation portal²⁹ was opened to the people so that they could take part in policymaking and express their voices (MOIS 2017: 73, 99). In addition to this, the government constructed a portal system for public participation to facilitate public participation in government administration. Even local governments provided the public

²⁹ www.epeople.go.kr

with opportunities to express their opinions on the decision-making process by installing web-based communication channels.

5.5.4. The period of e-government extension in Korea

Turning to the Lee Myung-bak regime (2008-2013), the government announced its final master plan for national informatisation. Similar to President Roh's ICTs policy direction, Lee's government announced the "National Informatisation Plan" as soon as he was inaugurated in 2008. The aims of the national informatisation were to make 'a competent knowledge-based government', 'well-being of the people through digitalisation', and 'an information society based on trust' (MOIS 2017: 78-79). The plan set by the Lee administration mainly focused on building the infrastructure that was suitable for the new digital convergence age (the National Information Society Agency [NIA] 2010; Lee 2012: 105). Furthermore, the Lee government chose "A good country to do business" as a national agenda and supported various enterprises by providing single window service, which is G4B: Government for Business (MOIS 2017: 72). As part of that, the Lee administration opened the Korean government portal³⁰ as a one-step e-government service for various agencies in 2009 (MOIS 2017: 63).

President Lee worked as a mayor of Seoul, the capital city of Korea, during President Roh's tenure from 2002 to 2006. It needs to be noted that when Lee was a mayor of Seoul, he had experienced the export of the e-government system of Seoul to Saga province in Japan and Moscow in Russia in 2004 (Dong-A Ilbo, 4 November 2004³¹). President Lee intensively focused on the economic aspect aiming at ICTs productivity and expansion of the job market using a digital network. Regarding this,

³⁰ www.korea.go.kr

³¹ Hwang, T. H. (2004). "Exported 'e-government system' in Seoul to Moscow" (*in Korean*) <https://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=101&oid=020&aid=0000268775>.

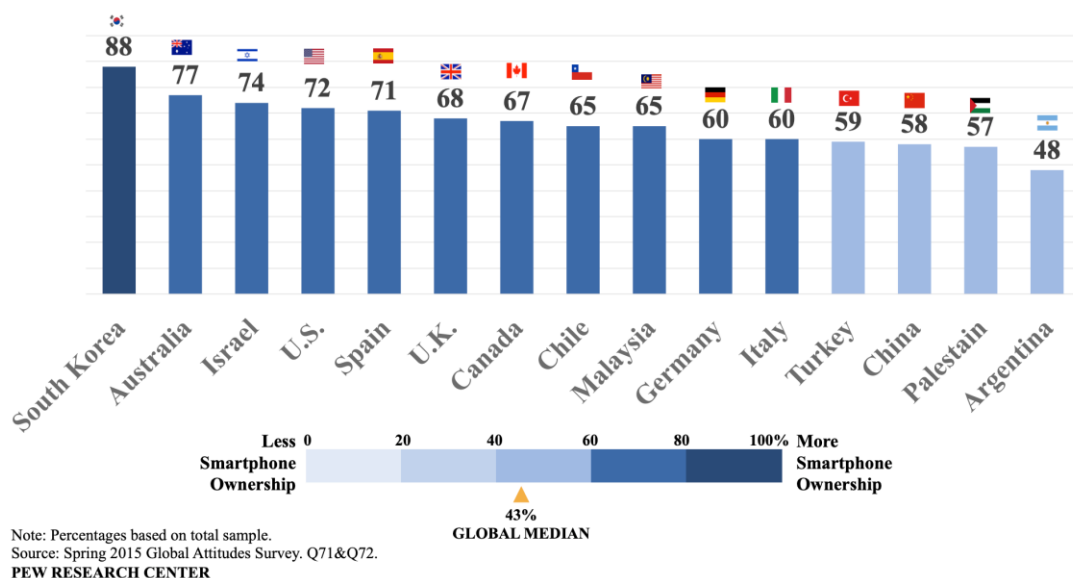
Lee (2012: 103) argues that the Lee government considered the development of the ICTs sector as an essential element to earn foreign money and open a new job market.

“Our main task is to overcome the point at issue, our economic crisis. However, we also have to prepare for our future. Therefore, our full-scale promotion of informatisation is valuable as a new growth engine for the future of Korea.”

(Address by President Lee Myung-bak ‘Visionary Announcement for IT’, 8 December 2008)

Since the early 2000s, Korea has become one of the hotbeds of innovation in mobile services, with over 75 per cent of the population owning mobile phones (Yoo et al. 2005). As the number of smartphone users in Korea dramatically increased since 2010, people have quickly turned from computer-based media to the new mobile devices for communication as well as information searching. Regarding this, a survey from the Pew Research Centre in 2016 (*Figure 12*) shows that Koreans have the highest rate of smartphone use in the world.

Figure 12. World smartphone ownership rates



Source: The author made this figure based on data from EtNews (23 February 2016)

“I remember that it was in 2009 that Korea first imported the iPhone. The adoption of smartphones was quite late, but in the next three to four years, the whole nation was using smartphones.” (Lee, W. T., a senior researcher from the KISDI, 22 September 2017)

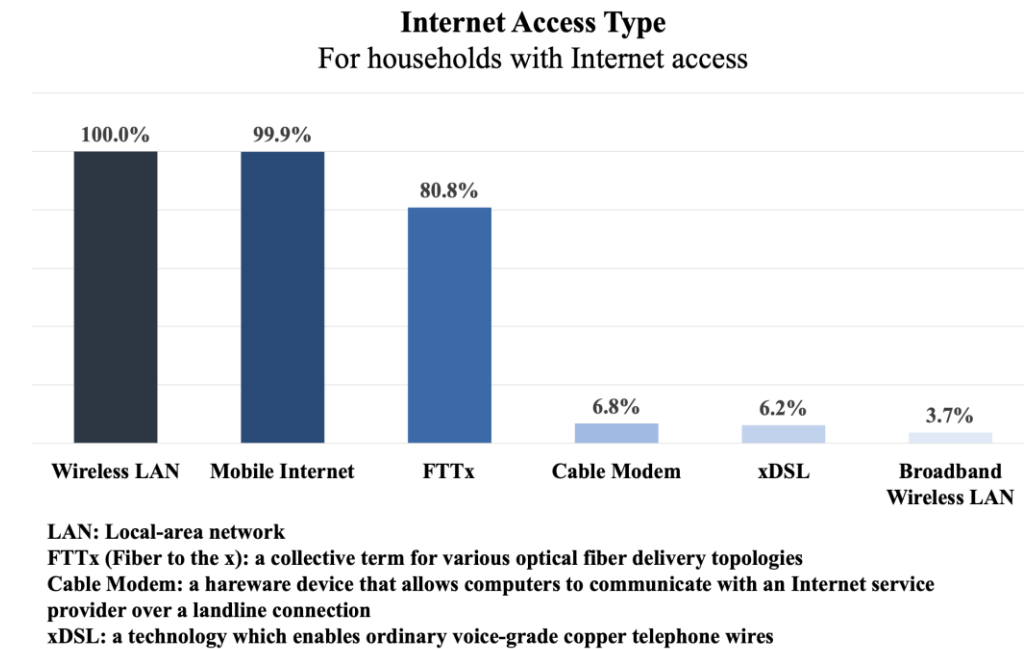
To catch up this mobile trend in the society, the government conducted the “Master Plans for Mobile Government for the Realisation of an Advanced Administrative State”. Based on the infrastructure the previous governments built, the “Mobile E-government Basic Plan” in 2010 and “Smart E-government Promotion Plan” in 2011-2015 were established. As a part of this, it embarked the “Mid-to-Long-Term Promotion Plan for Mobile Government Service”, aiming to become the best smart government (MOIS 2017: 89).

“With the surge of the number of smartphone users in Korea since 2010, people have quickly shifted from computer-based services to the new mobile communication tools and information search platforms. As a means to meet this change, in 2010, the government implemented the ‘Master Plan for Mobile Government for the Realisation of an Advanced Administrative State’.” (MOIS 2017: 89)

In the mid-2010s, it can be said that Korean society had undergone another technical information revolution due to the advent of mobile gadgets such as smartphones. As more and more people use mobile devices daily, it is regarded that the whole Korean society became more interconnected regardless of places and time. Regarding this, statistics from the Ministry of Science and ICT [MSI] & Korea Internet and Security Agency [KISA] (2019) show that the rate of usages of digital networks in Korea appeared considerably high (**Figure 13 and Figure 14**). These figures show that

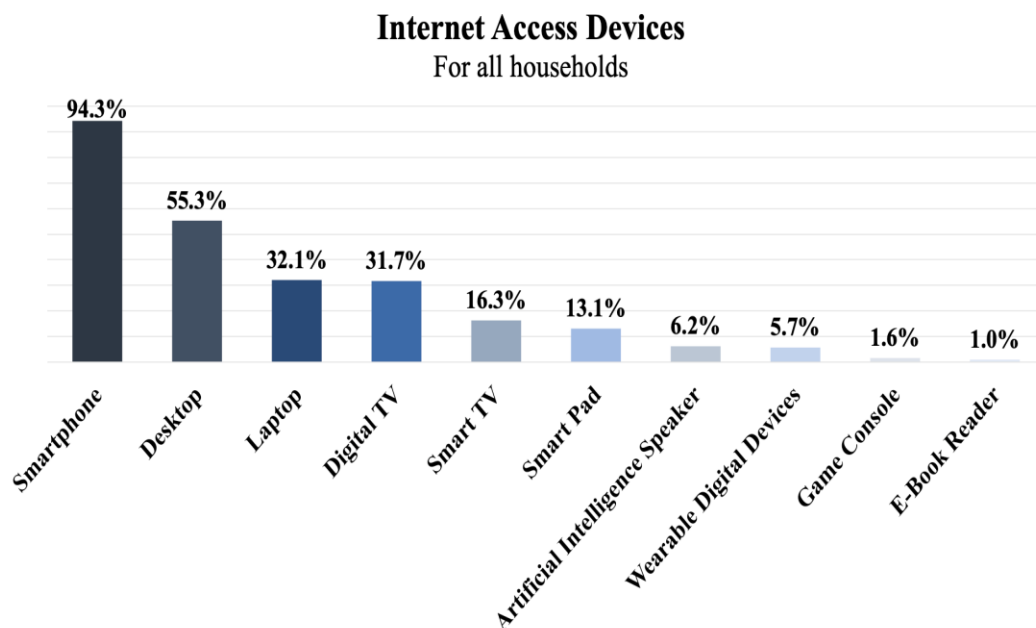
almost all Koreans use various digital devices, including mobile gadgets such as smartphones.

Figure 13. Survey on households with Internet access type in Korea in 2018



Source: Ministry of Science and ICT [MSI] & Korea Internet and Security Agency [KISA](2019)

Figure 14. Survey on households with Internet access devices in Korea in 2018



Source: Ministry of Science and ICT [MSI] & Korea Internet and Security Agency [KISA](2019)

In the 2010s, new digital communication systems based on SNSs and mobile communicative platforms among the people have had a significant impact on social transformation in Korea. Turning to the SNSs and mobile media era, it was considered that a range of the Korean government's digital uses becomes expanded, and its impacts become powerful more and more. In particular, as digital media become more widespread and sophisticated, the government tended to make greater use of a variety of digital administrative platforms from the government's digital websites to SNS channels and mobile platforms in order to publicly deliver diverse forms of information (Porumbescu 2016: 1311). In this vein, the technological environment itself had been developed with advanced technology such as big data and Cloud.

The Park Geun-hye administration launched "Government 3.0 Basic in 2013 and Promotion Plans" in 2014. It was designed to strengthen the competence of the government by expanding the efficiency of communication between governmental organisations and the provision of public services. Furthermore, the government started the pilot service of the 'Government 24', which is the integration portal site the government ran in 2016. According to MOIS's report (2017: 82), it planned to enhance the developmental strategies towards e-government by launching the "2020 Master Plan for e-government" in 2016, pursuing becoming an administrative powerhouse.

Moreover, in this dynamic digital environment, the Park government set out a political initiative called the "Creative Economy", which is related to the ICTs industrial policies to promote Korea's economic growth. In particular, achieving a large amount of profit, approximately US\$ 534 million, from the e-government system exports in 2015, Korea proved that it is one of the most developed countries in terms of e-government (MOIS 2017: 83). Considering this, Hwang and Shin (2017: 1-2) argue that ICTs has played an essential role as one of the major driving forces for its

economic development and productivity growth as well as administrative innovation during the Park's regime (Lee 2012).

5.6. The Korean government's digital media uses

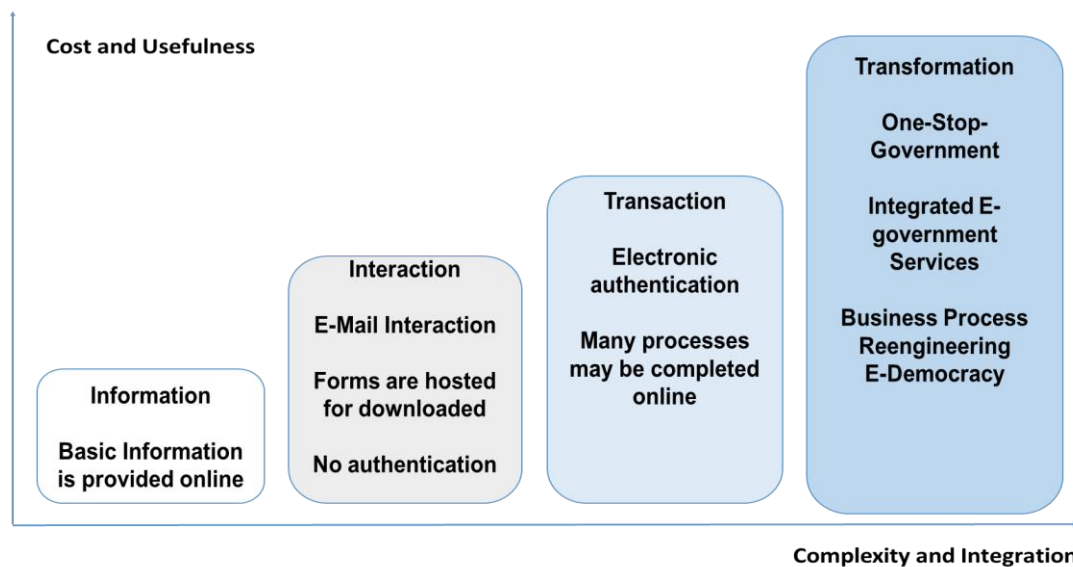
Since the early 2000s, digital diffusion has been a universal phenomenon in the world, and it has already taken a considerably important position in the Korean government. In the digital era, based on the ICTs infrastructure the previous Korean regimes actively applied digital communication systems to the administrative tasks for various reasons such as not only administrative efficiency and economic growth but also the encouragement of public participation. Considering this, this section reviews theoretical approaches of e-government developmental process in Korea and analyses its function in the society. Also, it identifies the evaluations of the Korean government's digital use in the context of democracy.

5.6.1. The developmental process of Korea's digital government

As digital technologies develop and societies transform continuously, the concept of e-government has been evolved in practice by many scholars. According to them who have studied the transformation process of digital government, the evolving process of the digital government can be distinguished by three stages: (1) a simple web presence stage, (2) a transition stage to more interactive tools such as e-mail, or social networking sites, and (3) the present step of digital government is defined diversely either as 'seamless delivery of government services (Ronaghan 2002),' 'e-participation (Hiller & Bélanger 2001),' 'e-democracy (Wescott 2001),' or 'government transformation (Baum & Maio 2000)' (Veit & Huntgebruth 2013: 11-12).

Regarding this, Baum and Maio (2000) suggested the digital government maturity model (**Figure 15**). Considering the early Korean digital government development process, the digital government maturity model proposed by Baum and Maio (2000) seems to fit to explain the Korean case of digital government development. According to what we have observed in the preceding sections, the government has developed digital technologies step by step even though the degree varies depending on each regime and continuously applied them to both governmental and societal fields.

Figure 15. Digital government maturity model



Source: Baum and Maio (2000) in Foundations of Digital Government by Veit and Huntgebruth (2013: 12)

Through digital technologies, the Korean government improved the feasibility, expertise and security of government resource management by constructing government-wide data centres and integrating the government information system (Park et al. 2012: 336). many observers argue that Korea has made a great deal of progress in government effectiveness through reforms and innovations in terms of ICTs (Kim 2002; Yun 2006; Kim 2010b: 802). Regarding this, Lyu (2006: 266) maintains that the trajectory of digital media usages of the government presented that the Korean e-

government has been mainly used for efficiency-oriented government reforms. Lyu also claims that e-government acts as an effective means or mechanism for ‘all-inclusive policy-making’ so that the government realise more efficient government (ibid: 263). The government’s digital communication has intermittently emphasised the importance of democratic qualities, but it is the concept of efficiency that has been pursued more consistently (Park et al. 2012: 119).

More importantly, Korea’s digital government has improved the efficiency of administrative work and provided better public services through digital media in the administration and policy-making processes (Park et al. 2012: 336). The Ministry of Public Administration and Security [MPAS] (2010) states, “E-government was fundamentally established as an infrastructure for developing the foundation for a democratic society.” In addition to this, according to Korean Association for Policy Studies [KAPS] (2011), digital government systems of Korea are considered as useful administrative tools not only to improve effectiveness and evaluate the quality of public service but also to promote active public participation in governance.

“Korea has the best e-government system not only in Asia but in the entire world. There is no better example of citizen-centric e-government may be found, and no other nation exhibits advanced digital government programs in Korea.”
(Warf 2016: 34)

In this vein, Park et al. (2012: 336) maintain that the government’s digital use affected democracy by increasing public participation. Chung (2015) also claims that the digital media use of the government can be described as a tool which can increase the publics’ political participation and accomplish an ‘open government to the public’. In particular, Warf (2016: 34) states that it did not take a long time until Korea moved

beyond simple diffusion of information to operate digital technologies that offer maximum citizen feedback, 'a sign of a healthy and well-functioning democracy'. Given that, while the Korean government mainly considered economic and administrative efficiency aspects at the whole stages of e-government establishment, democratic implications in the recent use of e-government are also regarded as an essential value in the Korean society.

5.6.2. Evaluation of Korean government's digital media use

It is difficult to precisely distinguish the government's digital media use between the level of the administrative service provider and the level of the public communicational channel. Nevertheless, it is still important to be noted that the Korean government's digital media use has continuously been changing, and now it is difficult to understand it as merely an administrative tool since it is regarded as having a significant impact on democracy in society. In this vein, digital use of the Korean government is no longer only defined as an administrative means but as a useful public communication tool.

However, some critics argue that there are some substantial issues concerning the consequences of the Korean government's digital media use on democracy. Hague and Loader (1999: 6) argue that while such digital use of the government is useful for improving democratic institutions, and the considerable increase in local, regional, and state government websites should be welcomed as attempts to improve the citizen-government interface, they do not seem to constitute an entirely new democratic system. Although Lyu (2006) admits that the Korean digital government's democratic potential, he also critically points out that the government's efforts in terms of digital government-related reform have been held back due to Korea's macro-level institutional

rigidities: an immature democracy, unbalanced institutional development of central government, political parties and civil society, lack of a participatory culture, and traditional hierarchical social norms.

In this vein, Lee (2012: 132) claims that there have been questions concerning “The popular belief that the Korean digital government has advanced the quality of Korean society and political communication culture.” According to Lee, public communication culture in the digital age led to the government’s desire to supervise the communicative networks even though the digital media has become an important communication tool for promoting freedom of socio-political expression in Korea (ibid: 4). “Digital space is also becoming an electronic dungeon patrolled by the neo-authoritarian government because of its anxieties with regard to digital users’ freedom of expression” (ibid: 5). Although the government should defend its citizens’ freedom of expression, the Korean government has not played the normative role as a public mediator to protect the public’s equal rights.

Regarding this, Frank William La Rue, a UN Special Rapporteur, noted the “ironic” aspects of Korea’s ICT development, including its advanced broadband Internet when visiting Korea in 2009. According to Rue, “It is crucial to protect and promote the right to freedom of opinion and expression in cyberspace paralleling technological advancement in Korea” (People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy [PSPD] news site 2009³²). In this vein, although the government’s operation of digital communication tools is regarded as a significant meaning in the democratic society, it also seems that digital communication in Korea is at stake in terms of democracy.

To sum up, although there can be ideal purposes of the Korean government in using digital government, in reality, there have been various barriers to strengthen

³² People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy [PSPD]. (2009). UN Special Rapporteur Faced; “Ironic Korea; IT Power but Freedom of Opinion and Expression Oppressed” (26 October) <https://prachatai.com/english/node/1460>

democracy. Even though the complicated relationship between the government's digital communication development and democratisation cannot be simply explained, "It needs to discuss the relatively new and emerging idea of digital communications in democratic countries (Oladepo 2015: 30)". Therefore, further examinations are needed to prove the impacts of digital communications on democratic society in Korea.

5.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, it was identified that the rapid speed of technological, political, and economic developments massively contributed to Korean society in various ways during the last twenty-five years. It can be said that due to the government's continuous efforts, digital communications are deeply and widely embedded in Korean society. For various internal and external reasons, the Korean government has intentionally focused on developing the ICTs sector, and it resulted in Korea becoming one of the exemplary countries in terms of the development of digital communications. In particular, while the Korean government heavily invested in ICTs development due to economic reason at the early developmental stage, now the digital use of the government is considerably influencing Korean society in various ways.

It can be said that the development of digital communication has been processed with the democratisation of Korean society at the same time. Regardless of if it is advantageous or disadvantageous, it will be the right assumption that digital communication and democracy in society mutually affect each other in a democratic country. Given the discussions above, no one could deny that the society in which we live is inextricably linked to digital communication. In particular, the Korean government's digital use is not just regarded as efficient administrative tools, but as useful communication tools that can have the potential to affect democracy in Korean

society. However, it was identified that there are critical views on the impact of the Korean government's digital communication with the people on democracy in society.

In this sense, the relationship between the government's digital use as a public communication tool and the entailed social and democratic transformation needs to be examined through further empirical study. Therefore, the following chapters will more specifically discuss Korean digital communications in the context of democracy by analysing the political and social phenomena that have affected Korean democracy.

Chapter 6. The Korean government's political use of digital media

6.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to investigate how the government's digital communication has affected democracy in Korea to solve the research question 2-1. *“How has governmental digital communication affected democracy in Korea?”* To do this, it first observes the Korean political changes and its political communication transition from the traditional media era to the present digital era. Furthermore, it investigates how the Korean governments' communication has changed in the processes of the political transition and democratisation by regime changes. More specifically, it scrutinises different stances of the Korean governments to communicate with the public through digital media by comparing conservative and progressive regimes. Finally, it figures out what type of democracies in Korean society has been enhanced by the Korean government's digital communication with the public.

6.2. Korean politics and governmental communication changes

Korean politics has increasingly become digitally mediated due to the development of digital technologies, and the importance of digital communication in Korean society has been growing continuously. The Korean governments during the last twenty-five years have actively adopted digital media as tools of political communications. In particular, as the importance of digital communication increased with regime changes, Korean governments have paid more attention to digital mediated communications. To understand this transition, this section investigates Korea's

political system and how the Korean government's communication changed in the present digital age compared to the traditional media era more specifically.

6.2.1. Korean political systems

The Korean political system and its democratisation process are different from other democratic countries. Korea has unique political characteristics compared to Western countries and even other Asian nations in many ways. In the Korean political system, there are several parties based on varying political ideologies. However, it can be regarded that Korean politics has been operated mainly on a bi-fractured system. It can be regarded that the Korean political situation tends to be explained by these two opposing political forces, progressivism and conservatism (*Figure 16*).

Figure 16. Comparisons between progressive and conservative regimes

	Progressive regimes	Conservative regimes
Communication type	Enhancing public communication	Minimising communication
Political Ideology	For the people	Elitism
Connection to wealth	Anti-symbiotic relationship with <i>Chaebol</i>	Pro- <i>Chaebol</i> (<i>Conglomerates</i>)
Media propensity	Pro-ICT, Digital media	Pro-Traditional media
Democracy type	Participatory (Direct) democracy	Representative democracy

Source: Author

According to *Figure 16*, it seems that while the progressive regimes have a stronger participatory, open to the people tendency, the conservative one puts more emphasis on the representative nature of the politicians elected by the people. The progressive political power pursues politics centred on the public and operated by

ordinary people. With a liberal perspective, they put great value on a citizens' participation and seek improvement of society through reform rather than maintenance of a system. In addition, the progressive forces try to minimise the size of the marginalised class and provide all citizens with equal opportunities. They can gain strength to oppose the existing conservative political power by drawing political support from ordinary people and actively leading the people's political participation.

In contrast to this, conservative political forces are based on elitism than participatory democracy (see, Kim 1999: 39, 214). According to them, the representatives such as elite politicians and civil servants must deal with significant political, social, and economic issues and make decisions in terms of them. Furthermore, they suggest a society where the convergence of expert intelligence and collective intelligence on citizen participation is a direction for future democracy. From the conservative perspective, if the government shares too much information with the people, it may cause fatigue and confusion in society. Given that, they argue that not all citizens need to know all the government's affairs and society tends to be more confused because of the various voices. Thus, the political actors need not collect all the opinions but listen to the public voices selectively in order to create a better society that the people pursue.

As the regime changes took place every five years, the Korean governments' communication has been transformed by the different tendencies of each regime. The Korean governmental communication initiatives and aims varied depending on which regime was in power, and the differences are easily found. The progressive regimes tend to use digital technology to expand people's participation in contributing to a democratic society. However, due to this tendency of focusing on the opinions of the public, they are often accused of being populist by the opposition, conservatism.

Contrary to progressive political power, the conservative political forces have a fundamental question about whether every single individual's opinion shared through digital platforms is beneficial to the society and worthwhile of consideration and deliberation. In this context, it seems that the conservative forces do not emphasise listening to the voice of majorities that much, even if conservative political forces think that development of ICTs is essential.

6.2.2. The transition of governmental media communication in Korea

Similar to other countries, dominant political communication tools in Korea were traditional media such as broadcasting, radio, and newspapers in the past. Until the Roh Tae-woo regime in the early 1990s, a few terrestrial channels monopolised the whole broadcasting market share. Traditional mass media have repeatedly been instructed by the governments on their appropriate roles and used to support and cooperate with the authorities, by putting an emphasis on positive news and ignoring information from opposing political parties, and to imitate counterparts in the West (Cho 2016). In addition to this, the traditional media channels often abandoned regular broadcasts and replaced them with special government programs.

In this vein, Heuvel and Dennis (1993) report that the Korean governments have regulated traditional media such as broadcasting and radio since the authoritarian regimes (Youm 1998: 173). Ordinary people did not have many options in terms of channels, but their only option was whether or not they were exposed to government messages. The people had to be exposed to selected messages and limited information sent by the government through traditional media channels such as broadcasting, radio, and newspapers. Until that time, it seems that the conception of mutual communication between the government and people was a surrealistic idea.

Regarding the governments' communication with the people in a coercive political and social atmosphere in the authoritarian regimes, the governments seemed to recognise the people as objects to be enlightened. In the authoritarian era, Korean regimes showed a similar situation to the other Asian countries in terms of governmental communication through traditional media. Their main objectives were to educate the public, instill positive attitudes, and establish cordial relationships with the government (Lent 1998: 152). After the end of the authoritarian regimes, however, there were still pressures on the media environment. Traditional media such as broadcasting, radio, and newspapers could not escape from the control of coercive political regulations.

“To eliminate an atmosphere of suspicion about the legitimacy of the regime, the government had tried to promote the regime coercively. At that time, people were considered as objects that needed to be enlightened. The government tried to deliver one-sided messages to the people, such as by screening the governmental movies in rural areas.” (Jeon, S. O., a senior civil servant from the MCST and a former civil servant from the GIA, 29 September 2017)

Turning to Kim Young-sam's regime, broadcasting finally turned into the multi-channel era with the launch of general cable sending thirty channels under the Kim administration in 1995. Nevertheless, after the end of the authoritarian regimes, there were still pressures on the media environment. Under the regulative atmosphere, previous governments in Korea mainly focused on making publications, giving briefings, and holding press conferences. It can be said that when media options were not diverse in Korea before the digital media era, public surveys were the only way for the government to get to know public opinion.

In the Kim Dae-jung regime, there were more dramatic changes in the media environment due to digital technology development. The Internet has had a considerable impact on the overall political communication environment, including governmental communications. Furthermore, the emergence of PC has influenced the diversification of the options within the media environment as well as in broadcasting. The governmental communication environment changes have improved this situation through extensive digital use. In the digital age, governments have tried to communicate with people through digital platforms directly. Both the central government and local governments are using a variety of digital channels for sharing and interacting with the people. Regarding this, it seems evident that political communication in Korea significantly changed, compared to the dictatorial regimes.

6.2.3. The government's role as a communicator

The traditional conservative media companies played a role as a gatekeeper as well as an opinion leader with their perspectives and tendencies in Korean society. Traditional conservative media have acted as an influential opinion leader and played a role in attracting people's attention to the issues they consider significant. In this vein, it would not be an exaggeration that the significant press companies, such as Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Ilbo, and DongA Ilbo, have been playing a role in the social agenda setting. Moreover, it can be considered that this phenomenon formed 'media cartel' in Korean society (see, Lee 2010), which has considerable political impacts in shaping public opinions.

There have been continuous critical opinions about this function of the existing conservative media and the traditional communication mechanism in Korea. Firstly, it is difficult to say that the major media companies represent the positions of the general

public as they express their thoughts by using some opinion leaders' thoughts. It can often be seen in a society that specific interest groups distort reality by either putting comments in their interest or condemning other people. Secondly, some social issues could have been policy agendas only after traditional conservative media dealt with them as social problems. In this mechanism, without help by mass media, many cases that social problems and issues cannot be reflecting in a policy-making process, or even becoming a policy agenda in Korean society. Thus, in reality, there have been many difficulties for public opinions to become formulated into policy.

The existing conservative media seemed not to represent the voice of the public. Nevertheless, traditional conservative media power has been enormously significant in Korean society, and its function of creating social agendas is still dominant because above all triggering devices such as government announcements or media exposure are essential in order for social issues to enter the policy agenda. While this situation was even more complicated before democratisation, as the use of digital media becomes widespread, these functions of traditional media tend to be dispersed. It can be assumed that the growing popularity of digital use has relatively undermined these conservative media dependences on which the government's communication strategies were based.

It seems that the influences of traditional media are relatively diminished due to the emergence of digital media. The agenda-setting function of traditional media has shifted to digital media to some extent at present. Through digital media communication, the government can directly deliver what it wants to say to the people and give much more specific information that the traditional conservative media cannot convey to the public. In this sense, the government can take the role of a gatekeeper of the traditional media for itself by running digital media channels. While the operator of traditional conservative media is a private media company, turning to the digital age,

the government could obtain a role as operator of its digital channels for communications.

“In the past, agendas set by several traditional media and governments became social issues that people regarded as important in society. However, in more recent times, it seems that the agenda can come from communication among ordinary people, and the government often perceives it as a problem. Also, the social agendas presented by the traditional media may not be following the agendas that citizens feel. Recently, the common complaints which are not sufficiently expressed through powerful traditional media tend to spread among young generations on the virtual spaces on the Internet.” (Jeon, S. O., a senior civil servant from the MCST and a former civil servant from the GIA, 29 September 2017)

Moreover, it can be assumed that the influence of communication among the people on digital media, including SNSs, could be getting greater to offset the problem of the traditional media. Through digital communication systems, the public can deliver their opinions directly and what they want to the government at the same time. The changes in communication tools in society have prompted the Korean government to follow the digital trend and changed its way of communicating with ordinary people. While the government mainly played a role as a sender in a one-way communication system in the traditional media era, the role of the government seems to be emphasised as both a receiver and a provider at the aspect of accountability in the digital era.

6.3. Variations of governmental communications by political regime changes

Digital communications of the Korean government have been developed sequentially according to the background of the times and regime changes. Indeed, each government in Korea had to adapt to a rapidly changing digital media environment and develop its strategies appropriately. In this context, Korean regimes have shown different communication strategies, depending on the nature of the regime. Considering this, this section analyses how the Korean governments have used digital media in politics and how differently they have responded to the related social issues. Also, it examines different ways and directions that the previous governments had shown to cope with the domestic conflicts as well as the political crisis in the digital age.

6.3.1. Different communication ideologies of the Korean governments

During the last twenty-five years, there have been regime changes in the political mainstreams three times. Since the 1990s, Korea has had six presidents Kim Young-sam (Conservative), Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun (Progressive), Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye (Conservative), and Moon Jae-in (Progressive). As mentioned above, the main political forces are mainly divided into progressive and conservative forces in Korean politics. The differences in the political tendencies and ideologies of the regimes born after the emergence of the first civilian regime in Korea are distinct. Moreover, in this process of political evolution and democratisation, the Korean government's digital communication has also steadily and interconnectedly evolved.

“We have experienced ten years of progressive regimes and another ten years of conservative regimes. Each regime has experienced the process of maximising and minimising the role of digital media in public communications.” (Lyn, B. T., a previous senior civil servant from the GIA, 26 September 2017)

The Korean regimes’ attitudes toward digital media communications are on opposite sides, depending on whether they were progressive or conservative regimes. Admittedly, from an idealistic perspective, it is considered that a significant trend of each government’s communication is fundamentally the same in that it pursues a better democratic society based on the national ideology of democracy. However, they have ideological differences in terms of what values they fundamentally emphasise more in ruling the state. Given the differences between the two political mainstreams’ political ideologies and communication initiatives, it can also be assumed that there is a clear difference between the progressive and conservative regimes in terms of public communication policies. Since the establishment of the digital infrastructure has been completed, the regimes have had more clearly distinguished different attitudes toward digital communications.

The previous governments’ attitudes toward digital communication-related issues are very different based on digital media developmental processes and political changes. The various incidents that have happened in Korean society show that each regime in Korea has different propensities in terms of digital communications. Considering this, it can be regarded that Korean governmental communication has been operating under either conservative or progressive ideologies, depending on which regime has the power. While progressive forces emphasise efforts to open government and the value of participatory democracy, conservative ones put more emphasis on procedural rationality and efficiency. These major political forces pursuing

fundamentally different political ideologies in Korea have taken different attitudes towards both digital use and public communications based on different values.

There is no doubt that the political support of progressive regimes is from the majority of ordinary people. It can be regarded that communication with the people was essential to the progressive regimes that fundamentally need the public's support. In particular, back in the era of the digital infrastructure establishment, the progressive regimes in Korea have shown a friendly tendency towards ICTs and venture enterprises. Furthermore, the progressive regimes in Korea indeed actively used digital communication technologies that enabled direct interaction with a wide range of people in politics. In this vein, it needs to be noted that the progressive regimes in Korea were able to operate digital communication systems for interactions with the people in a relatively democratic environment because it exerted power after democratisation.

In contrast, the recent consecutive conservative regimes in Korea received relatively unfavourable evaluations, particularly in terms of forming a democratic communication environment. Ironically, although the conservative regimes adopted digital communication platforms that were systemised by the previous regimes and were being exposed to a more advanced media environment, they do not seem to use them to enhance democratic communication with the public. Regarding this, it can be considered that the differences from the previous progressive regimes would be that the successive conservative government had no will to communicate with the people, which may be based on its fundamental political ideologies.

6.3.2. Political regime changes and digital communication development in Korea

Back in the 1990s, the civilian governments in Korea, Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung regimes, mainly focused on developing ICTs and the digital government system. In this stage, the government completed an essential digital communication infrastructure establishment and introduced an e-government system in Korea. While the government's use of digital media was mainly for administrative efficiency and as a means of economic benefits, the changed economic and societal situation in some respect seemed to provide the political opportunity for evolving the government's digital media use more and more. Although the early civilian regimes emerged in the 1990s had different political background, conservative and progressive regimes respectively, both of them tended to regulate society in terms of digital media use. It seems that the early civilian regimes may have had to regulate the digital use of society to construct initial systems at the early stage of establishment of digital society.

Turning to the 2000s, the emergence of the Roh Moo-hyun government took place in 2003. Although the consecutive progressive regimes moving from Kim Dae-jung regime to Roh Moo-hyun regime have the same political ideology, each government seemed to focus on slightly different values in terms of digital use according to the background of times. While President Kim put more emphases on the "value-added economic effects of the cultural industry (Lee 2012: 103)", President Roh tended to focus more on enhancing the efficiency of administrative systems and public relations, which is more centred on communication with the people. Since the Roh regime, the Korean governments' attitudes toward public communication through digital media, differentiated depending on political ideologies and philosophies can be more clearly distinguished. Although all the governments in Korea tried to take

advantage of diverse media from traditional to digital ones for political reasons, they differently approached the way of treating digital communication.

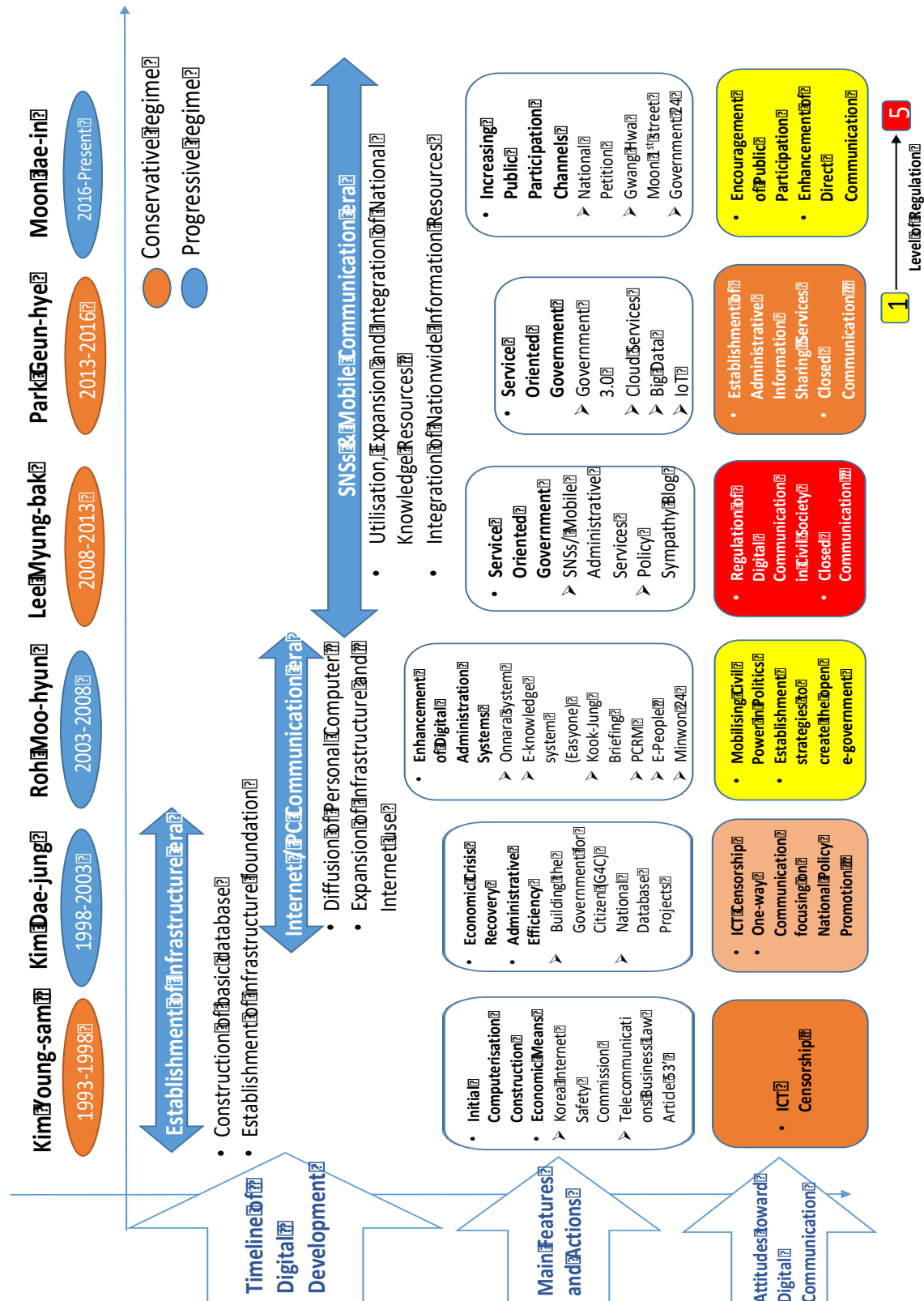
In particular, since the 2000s when the SNSs began to emerge, the political use of digital media became more prominent, and during this period, the governmental communication channels became more diversified and personalised. Nevertheless, although the successive conservative governments had to follow the rapidly changing digital trends which are already widespread and deeply embedded in society, it seems that the governments have shown contradictory attitudes toward public communication due to some reasons such as the governments' characteristics and conservative tendencies. Indeed, Cheong Wa Dae [Blue House] under the conservative regimes, the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments, tended not to communicate with the people. While these consecutive conservative governments tended to use digital media for providing better public services, they did not seem to place importance on communicating with the public.

Turning to the present Moon Jae-in regime, it can be said that the government's public communicational tendency is similar to the early progressive Roh regime's communication initiatives that centred on public participatory ideologies. From the days as a presidential candidate, President Moon tended to emphasise digital interactions and communications with the people. In the situation that digital culture has settled in Korean society steadily, the current Moon government is the most actively engaged in communicating with the public through digital platforms for public communication than any previous regimes.

As the digital communication era comes in earnest, the Korean government, as a political supplier had to use digital media for the many reasons already given. Social changes involve a multi-dimensional transformation of national developmental structure,

process, and system-level as well as to the means and objectives of the politics. Regarding the changes in Korean governments' actions in terms of digital communication, the *Figure 17* on the next page shows the changes in digital development by the Korean regime changes.

Figure 17. The timeline of digital communication development through regime changes



Source: This figure was made by the author based on 50-Year Footprints of Korean e-government 1967-2017, The Greatest Leap in Korea History (MOIS 2017) and Digital Society Development of Korea (NIA 2010: 7³³)

³³ National Information Society Agency [NIA]
<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un-dpadm/unpan042711.pdf>

6.4. Transformation of Korean governments' digital communications

During the recent twenty-five years, various political issues related to the digital age have been taking place in Korea, and the Korean governments had to cope with those issues. However, the attitudes of opposing political powers toward the social issues resulting from digital communication were very different. The different tendencies can be divided mainly into opposing directions, which are either mobilisation or control. In this vein, it can be considered that although digital communication technology has continuously evolved in the political transformation, the developmental degree of the Korean democracy was different depending on the government's tendencies. To understand the complex social and political changes with digital communication evolution in the Korean political context, this section more specifically investigates the Korean government's digital communication transformation process by each regime's specificities.

6.4.1. The early progressive governments (1993-2002)

After a series of military-led governments, there was a remarkable political transition in the 1990s when Korea's first two civilian presidents, Kim Young-sam (1993-1998) and Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003), were successively elected (Larson & Park 2014: 350). Some scholars argue that in the past twenty-five years, political democratisation in Korea was later accelerated by the emergence of the civilian government of Kim Young-sam (Moon 2016; Park et al. 2016: 11). Although these two civilian regimes, Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung governments, were born after long periods of military dictatorship, there is an apparent difference between them. The former succeeded by joining with the established power, while the latter was elected as

president through a horizontal shift of the power, opposition party becoming ruling power (Lee 2006c). In this sense, it can be presumed that these two regimes' characteristics could be reflected differently in their attitudes toward the media policies.

During the early civilian regimes, the Korean governments considered the ICT sector as a turning point of economic recovery, and at the same time, they also tried to enhance civil service as well as administrative efficiency. In particular, the Kim Young-sam government, which is the first civilian regime in Korea, highly focused on ICTs and its applications and were mainly concerned with providing quality public services and value-added information to the public (Lee et al. 2005: 99-100). Since the computerisation of the government's administration, the range of services that the government could provide to the public has been more extensive, and the people have been generally able to use various administrative services through the Internet such as tax inquiries or filing a civil complaint. Regarding this, traditional press media had positive perspectives toward the government's ICT plans. Given the contents of a news article about the government's plan for ICT development, the attitude to ICTs in Korea at that time seems to have been quite positive.

“More than 80 per cent of the advanced technologies that would lead to the 21st century are information and communication-related technologies. Therefore, the government decided to invest 45 trillion won (about US\$ 42.1 billion) from this year to 2015 in order to pave the way for building a highly advanced information society... It could implement the simultaneous nationwide simulations information age and resolve regional information gap. Videoconferencing systems would be increasingly common not only internal department in a company but also between companies, which resulted in saving time and costs... Especially it would help the balanced development of the land

by alleviating the concentration of population to a big city.” (Kyunghyang Shinmun, 21 April 1994: 26)

In the Kim Young-sam regime period, the consciousness about the definition of the public changed into that the public needed to be treated as consumers of government policies. The definition of the public to the government became very different from the one of the authoritarian regimes. While the public used to be regarded as objects that need to be enlightened by the government, turning to the more recent regime, the concept of the public has been improved. However, at the same time, the Kim Young-sam administration began censoring online communication through PC by enacting the ‘Telecommunications Business Law Article 53’ and establishing the world’s first online censorship organisation, ‘Korea Internet Safety Commission’ in 1995. Regarding this, it can be assumed that at least the digital use of the government at that time was not a means to improve democracy.

Compared to the Kim Young-sam regime, the other civilian government, the Kim Dae-jung administration was born on a political basis with the progressive tendency. As soon as the progressive regime started, the government had to increase work efficiency to overcome difficult national situations such as the financial crisis of the late 1990s. Thus, in order to overcome the national crisis, the Kim Dae-jung government figured out the main national weakness of itself: centralisation, lack of transparency, rigidity and low competitiveness. Furthermore, the Kim regime sophisticatedly set three objectives for major reform: ‘a small but efficient government’, ‘a highly economically competitive government’ and ‘a customer-oriented government’. In this vein, the Kim administration decided to make efforts to establish a robust information-oriented society to secure national competitiveness and implemented market-oriented reforms such as deregulation and privatisation.

During this time, civic organisations highly demanded corporate reform to make the governance structure of governmental organisations, and major industrial conglomerates more transparent and efficient. When the people suffered from the bankruptcy of corporations and layoff due to the economic crisis, the government had to persuade the people and seeks to cooperate through communication with the people to overcome the national crisis (KBS news, 20 March 2014³⁴; Hankyoreh, 20 August 2017³⁵). Considering this, Kim (2000a: 81) argues that periodic conditions in Korea during the Kim government, such as the financial crisis and the challenges of globalisation, may have influenced on the government's decision geared towards good governance, with the promotion of efficiency, transparency and accountability. Consequently, it can be assumed that these political and societal factors were working together with affected the early stage of digital communication development in Korean politics.

Despite this remarkable achievement of the government, it is regarded that there was a limitation of the early government's initiatives in that the government's computerisation was used on only a limited range of simple administrative work. The Kim Dae-jung government adopted the e-government mainly for the governmental service efficiency as well as the economic value it added, rather than focusing on the democratic values of public communications. Furthermore, PC did not tend to be used as a communication tool between the government and the people until the end of his regime. The government's digital use was as a means of one-way informational delivery at the level of informational notification. Overall, it is regarded that proper

³⁴ Kang, M. S. (2014). "History of the Past Korean Presidents Communications" (*in Korean*) <https://mn.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=2829983>

³⁵ Kim, B. H. (2017). "Kim Dae-jung four time of 'Dialogues with the people' and Roh Moo-hyun, even 'Dialogue with the prosecutor'" (*in Korean*) <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/bluehouse/807538.html>

policies and systems for online governmental communication had not been prepared until the end of his tenure.

Nevertheless, when discussing the evolution of the Kim Dae-jung regime in terms of communication with the people, there are two main points to deal with. One point is that the emergence of the Kim government means that the Korean political power moved from conservative forces to progressive ones, who have a strong tendency to listen to the voices of the public. Another significant point is that based on the progressive tendency, the form of dialogue with the public was fully established during his regime. As part of this, while until the time of the Kim Young-sam government the Ministry of Culture and Public Affairs [MCPA] acted as an official spokesperson for the government, the Kim Dae-jung government re-established the Government Information Agency [GIA] which was an independent governmental communication organisation in May 1999 as media platforms diversified. The Government Information Agency [GIA] during the Kim Dae-jung government focused more on communicating with the public through policy promotions than just controlling the media, compared to the previous regimes.

6.4.2. The emergence of the participatory government (2003-2008)

After the Kim Dae-jung regime, the birth of the Roh Moo-hyun government in 2002 has a significant meaning in those people who were young and had progressive tendencies replaced it. Although President Roh was a non-mainstream politician in Korea, which is very rare in Korean politics, he won the presidential election thanks to young generations voted for him through the Internet at the last minutes of the election. A prestigious foreign press regarded Roh's winning of the presidential election as the

‘World’s first internet president logs on’ (The Guardian, 24 February 2003³⁶). It needs to be noted that the Roh’s background of the victory of the election was civil society in the Internet era. Regarding this, many foreign presses delivered the presidential election in 2002 said that the election could be an Internet election, which was regarded as “a generational revolution” as the youngsters were able to gather through the Internet for the election (Hara & Jo 2007). Furthermore, some scholars argued that ‘netizen (*users of the Internet*) power’ could be materialised in that period.

6.4.2.1. The digital use of the participatory government

President Roh had something to do with the Internet in many ways. Even before Roh took office, his government made a transition team from the previous Kim government and announced that the government would accept online recommendations and suggestions from the public for selecting cabinet ministries. During his regime period, the ministerial candidates were elected through online elections, which was not a way the previous governments had used. Furthermore, the Roh administration emphasised a ‘public participatory government’ and encouraging public participation in the process of policy-making. By doing so, it tried to enhance the participatory mechanisms in operating digital governmental systems and relevant policies.

The policies of the Roh administration were related to the use of digital media and focused on ‘participation’ and ‘communication with the public’. More specifically, the Roh government tried to receive public opinions and comments through ‘the Public Discussion Room’ and ‘the National People’s Rights Commission’, and even reflected them into policies. The expansion of ways to participate in state affairs gave ordinary people more chances to express their opinions. It seemed to result in the citizens’

³⁶ Watts, J. (2003). “World’s first internet president logs on”
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2003/feb/24/newmedia.koreanews>

interest and desire to participate in government affairs. In particular, according to Larson and Park (2014: 353), the “Participatory Government” of the Roh regime reorganised in 2004 when mobile and SNSs such as Facebook began to emerge. It can be regarded that the government recognised the rising power of Korean civil society empowered by mobile communication, Internet usage and blogs, and tried to reflect this in policy circles.

The digital channels tended to be segmentalised and personalised since around the mid-2000s. Due to the digital media transition, governmental communication channels also had to be diversified. As the demand for administrative information by the public has increased, the Roh government began to give out more administrative information to meet the public’s expectation (MOIS 2017: 63). Meanwhile, the Roh government emphasised policy promotion through digital platforms. Thus, the government actively benchmarked private companies’ strategies to strengthen one to one two-way communication with their customers and applied their customer management strategies to policy promotion.

During the Roh regime, it was difficult for the government to publicise and conduct sufficient communications with the people due to the lack of budget. The government needed alternative communication tools instead of traditional media. For these practical reasons, the early form of digital media served as the government’s alternative communication tools. The Roh government began to operate Policy Customer Relationship Management (PCRM), which was an active two-way administrative public service system through the Internet.

The PCRM was regarded as a type of one-way communication with the citizens mainly through e-mail, which was a useful means for quick deliveries to receivers with low costs (Policy Briefing (Jeongchaek Briefing), 16 October 2006). Moreover, the

government created its portal site for the promotion of government policies. To deliver correct policy information and satisfy the people's rights to know, the Roh government opened 'State Affairs Briefing (Kukjeong Briefing)' in September 2003, which was one of the systems that were distinguishable from the former government. By doing so, the government could strengthen the function of policy promotions.

It can be said that the government actively attempted to systematise digital communication in order to engage citizens rather than relying on voluntary participation from the public. Regarding this, some observers including previous civil servant who had worked for the Roh administration positively evaluate the government's communication policies during the Roh regime. The advocates claim that governmental communication during the Roh government made strides from the one-sided throwing information based on authoritarianism model. Furthermore, they argue that digital communication systems under the Roh government were highly sophisticated and well equipped, and they have achieved both efficiency and effectiveness.

"When I met President Roh at official meetings, I realised that he was well aware of the importance of direct democracy. Based on his awareness, his strong will to inform the people directly seems to have affected his public communication systems such as 'State Affairs Briefing (Kukjeong Briefing)' and the 'Policy Customer Relationship Management (PCRM)' and communication-related policies. In particular, the 'PCRM' was to list the email addresses of specific stakeholders for each policy and send them the policy information. Meanwhile, although there had been an evaluation system in the previous regimes, it seems that the Roh administration put more emphases on the governmental organisations' performance of online policy promotion in terms of evaluations. I remember that the civil servants in the Government Information

Agency [GIA] reported the public criticisms and opinions on the government's policy proposals to the president every day. About forty organisations delivered their policy articles to the 'State affairs Briefing (Kukjeong Briefing)', which is a successor of the present 'Policy Briefing (Jeongchaek Briefing)'³⁷. We uploaded about a hundred articles after gatekeeping them per day. I remember that President Roh showed great interest by writing comments on it. We searched the contents on the online platforms operated by the private sectors, without running our tools on the Internet.” (Lyn, B. T., a previous civil servant from the GIA, 26 September 2017)

However, there are criticisms of the Roh government's public relations policies through digital media. Some observers point out that the Roh government tried to resist the existing conservative media by taking control of the press under the government. According to them, direct communication with the public through digital media was used as a useful tool to avoid criticisms from the existing media as well as to antagonise the existing conservative media. In particular, one of the interviewees argues that it seemed that there were some practical problems with the government operation of digital communication. According to him, it can be considered that the excessive interest in communication through digital platforms of the top government had adversely affected the lower organisations' public communication behaviours.

“The evaluation indexes made at the Roh government tended to be mainly focused on quantitative outputs. I think civil servants have been already used to these indicators. When participating in governmental online communication evaluation meeting, I can see that there are still the same problems even now.

³⁷ <http://www.korea.kr/main.do>

Therefore, it can be said that the members of governmental organisations did not come to an agreement about communication philosophy and its basic methodologies, and regarded digital media as just a kind of means of communication.” (Cho, J. Y., a CEO of a Korean PR agency for the government, 28 September 2017)

6.4.2.2. Pro-digital media tendency of the progressive regime

During the Roh government, there was a big backlash by conservative forces similar to the previous Kim Dae-jung government that was based on progressive power. The conservative parties, which were the main political power, blamed the Roh’s online friendly policies saying, “It is Internet populism,” “It incites the popular passion,” and “The government’s direct communication with the people is an inappropriate action ignoring the mediated politics centred on parliament” (see, Kim et al. 2010). In this context, the conservative forces claimed that direct communications of the government might evoke digital populism by ignoring the political actors representing agents such as the media and parties.

“I think the conservative forces which were based on opposition party at that time tended to create these kinds of issues intentionally, claiming that it is the internet populism that the government directly approaches the people ignoring the political actors acting as representative agents such as media and parties.”

(An interviewee who needed anonymity from MOSF, 7 September 2017)

At that time, conservative journalists were even more influential in shaping public opinions before the age when the whole society actively uses digital media. According to one of the interviewees, it has been regarded that there were unconditional

criticisms about the Roh administration by the major conservative media, Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Ilbo, and DongA Ilbo that used to occupy over 70 per cent of the newspaper market (Kim 2007: 200). In contrast, it seems that President Roh considered that the existing conservative media had a strong tendency to distortedly write policy reports and release them to the people at that time.

In this context, the pressroom in Cheong Wa Dae was regarded as a place that reporters from the major conservative media set their agendas that had an opposite stance to the Roh government. Due to the adversary political power, the Roh government closed the official pressroom and instead opened a press office so that all kinds of journalists could come in. Closing pressroom in Cheong Wa Dae by the Roh administration served as a kind of ideology against President Roh's reform policies and provided the oppositions with ammunition for attacking the radical reforms. More importantly, this reformation of the government meant that the previous media cartel broke down, and the influence of the major media companies became weaker than before.

"As President Roh was born under the power of netizens, he was more interested in online channels, and actively used them as a means of promoting and communicating during his tenure. Apart from that, since he was allergic to the existing conservative media, he put various policies to establish sound media relations. I believe that as for using online channels, he put more weight to check the existing media power rather than to communicate with the people. If my assumption is right, it was quite successful in some part." (Lyn, B. T., a previous civil servant from the GIA, 26 September 2017)

Regarding the adverse political situation, it seems evident that the government needed an alternative to the existing media, and digital media were used as the substitute to offset the situation at that time. Chang (2005) argues that due to the conservative media containment policy of the Roh regime, digital media emerged as an alternative press that has considerable empowerment by challenging the conservative media in Korea. In this vein, it can be a reasonable assumption that one of the main reasons why President Roh focused on the use of digital media to communicate with the public could be a resistance to the existing conservative media. Nevertheless, the government could not avoid a criticism that there was a dissonance such as the abolishment of the pressroom in Cheong Wa Dae in the process of forming a constructive relationship between the government and the media.

6.4.2.3. The cause of political conflicts between the progressive and conservative regimes

Since the mid-2000s, when diverse digital media platforms, including SNSs, began to emerge and become widespread, the government's use of digital media communication was more prominent. Furthermore, the digital communication-related political issues and phenomena were conspicuous since that time. Under the digital trend, the government created many web-channels in order to communicate with the people directly. Above all, by using these digital platforms, the government tried to collect diverse opinions about the policy agenda from the citizens through digital platforms. In this context, the Roh government with the name 'Participatory Government' achieved considerable progress in terms of digital communication because it tried to find a means of direct communication by itself and took advantage of it.

The Roh administration actively used digital media for political as well as administrative reasons. Under the Roh regime, Cheong Wa Dae acted as a head-office of public communication. President Roh explicitly set aims of the communication policies into three different categories: direct democracy, online and offline citizen participation and local administration (Kim 2010a: 172-173). In order to reach his objectives, he made a systemised administration information processing system. In addition to this, the government opened the official government web pages and provided a range of online civil services to the public. Furthermore, it attempted to upgrade personal communication services, introduce cable broadcasting and amended the broadcasting laws in order to form a progressive culture.

During his regime, the e-government project was designated as a major national representative task. The government focused on ways to further improve upon the already outstanding results of informatisation that was to encompass e-government, administrative reform, fiscal and tax reform, and decentralisation. Under this national task plan, the government contributed to the standardisation of the administrative system by distributing the standardised system, which is called the “e-Jiwon system (Easyone, E-knowledge system)”. This governmental administrative task management system evolved into the “On-Nara BPS System” that is a computerisation system of administrative tasks processing managed by the Korean government.

According to Kang and Min (2017: 193), these digital administration systems can be regarded as the core of the ‘system democracy’, which is similar to e-democracy. Through these online systems, the government attempted to implement participatory democracy based on recording everything about the government work, management of internal affairs on the principle of sharing and disclosure, and increasing transparency and accountability of policies. However, in this context, there was a noted political

issue in terms of the digital administrative system. In particular, it is regarded as an important political incident in that it showed conflicts between the previous progressive government and the conservative government in terms of the digital government system operation and political power.

After President Roh retirement, he copied the whole E-knowledge system and moved it to his hometown. When President Lee was in charge of state affairs, the government realised that national records were not in Cheong Wa Dae, but in Roh's hometown. It was not merely resolved but rather became a more pressing political dispute and caused political conflict. The National Archives of Korea under the Lee government which was placed in a crisis due to 'the mad cow disease case', sued the former President Roh because it was known that Roh would create a political debate site, 'Democracy 2.0'. It seems that the Lee government could not help repressing the former president who tried to encourage citizens to participate in politics by opening a digital forum even though he retired.

Regarding this, conservative press and party criticised the Roh government illegally leaked more than two million government's internal data (Yonhap News, 12 June 2008³⁸)' and 'North Korea Nuclear Confidentiality Document is not in Cheong Wa Dae, but in Roh's hometown, which is the so-called Bongha village (Munhwa Ilbo, 7 July 2008³⁹)'. Through this political event, it was proven that the government's digital use became important in political conflicts between the political forces.

"If President Roh had not attempted to open an online political participation site, which is called 'Democracy 2.0', after his retirement, there would not have

³⁸ Kim, J. W. & Lee, S. K., (2008). "Illegal leakage of internal data of Cheong Wa Dae at the end of 'Participatory Government'" (in Korean)

³⁹ Shim, E. J. (2008). "Raging battle between former and current governments about internal data leakage" (in Korean) <http://www.munhwa.com/news/view.html?no=20080707010702233160020>

been his tragic death as well as the suspicion of his family's bribery allegation."

(One of the dispatched government officials during the Lee regime cited by Wolgan Chosun, November 2017⁴⁰)

6.4.3. The recent conservative governments (2008-2016)

During the Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) regime, the government showed contrasting media tendencies to the Roh government. President Lee seemed to perceive digital media communication as the object of management rather than as a tool for democratic dialogue with the people. The Lee regime, which had re-established itself after the two successive progressive regimes, showed different ways against the communication policies that had been operated under the previous regimes. The new conservative regime either revised or withdrew communication policies, contrary to the existing policy direction that was centred on direct and civil participatory communication initiatives. Considering this, the political judgment as a conservative regime and his characteristics seem to have played a decisive role in policy communications.

6.4.3.1. Dismantling the communication infrastructure of the progressive regimes

During the Lee regime, there was a shift from a broad industrial strategy anchored by the ICT sector to treating ICT as merely one among many industries. The problem was that by 2008, successive waves of ICT-based innovation and the growth of digital networks had wiped out much of the old industrial landscape (Larson & Park

⁴⁰ Kim, T. W. (2017). "The tragedy of 'Internet President' Roh Moo-hyun and Moon Jae-in and 'Comment Democracy'" (*in Korean*)
<http://pub.chosun.com/client/news/viw.asp?cate=C01&mcate=M1001&nNewsNumb=20171126740&nid x=26741>

2014: 355). Following the revision of the Government Organisation Law, on February 2008, under the Lee administration, some departments of the Ministry of Information and Communication [MIC] were reorganised into the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism [MCST], the Ministry of Commerce Industry and Energy [MCIE], and the Ministry of Knowledge Economy [MKE] by incorporation of the previous ministries such as the Ministry of Science and Technology [MST] and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism [MCT].

The dismantling of the MIC and dispersion of its responsibilities represented a 180-degree turnaround in the institutional approach to ICT policy in Korea, changing in from an integrated model to a diffused one. The change eliminated the control tower role of the former MIC. In the meantime, the Lee government abolished the central governmental communication institution, the Government Information Agency [GIA]. In particular, President Lee was allergic to the GIA, which used to be the central governmental communication institution of the Republic of Korea. Back in 2003, the Roh administration pushed for a politically massive issue about the relocation of the capital city from Seoul to Sejong, which is in the middle of the Korean Peninsula. In this vein, the Seoul local government whose mayor was Lee Myung-bak (2002-2006) at that time opposed it fiercely.

While the GIA was a direct communication tool for the previous progressive governments, the new conservative government regarded it as an agency of advocacy for the previous regimes and policy promotion. In that time, the Grand National Party, to which Lee belonged, had criticised that through the GIA the Roh government promoted his regime rather than policies. Given that, the conservative party put the abolition of Government Information Agency [GIA] as the 2007 presidential election pledge. In the end, the GIA became downgraded to a department in the MCST, and all

the public officials were disbanded. Instead, the Lee government newly established an online spokesperson system in Cheong Wa Dae and each ministry of the government and also made the MCST manage the social media policies.

6.4.3.2. Pro-tradition (conservative) media tendency

It may be generally regarded that the directions of policies of the different governments who have different political ideologies are different because the basis of political support was different. When the conservative power retook political power in 2008, the relationship between the government and the conservative media that had a similar political view became much stronger than before. In this context, it can be considered that biased ideas and views of the conservative governments about the existing conservative media had been sturdily formed. The new conservative regimes, Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye (2013-2016) governments, went a completely different way from the progressive regimes' initiatives of digital communication policies. These conservative governments had a similar stance toward public communication through digital media.

The Lee government mainly stuck to approaches based on traditional media-dependent communication policies by employing government-friendly journalists as civil servants. The Lee administration as a conservative regime considered that the existing leading conservative presses such as Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Ilbo, and DongA Ilbo which were on the opposite side to the Roh government stood on his side. In this vein, the media policies that emphasise exchanges with traditional media were dominant such as radio speeches, television press conferences, and a presidential meeting with newspaper reporters.

The Park Geun-hye government, as another conservative regime, also had a similar tendency in terms of public communication initiatives to Lee's one. As the Park regime was born in the background of the existing conservative press' mobilising public opinions, the Park government tended to implement favourable policies for the conservative media and use the traditional media workforce in implementing the government communication. It also took control of the leading broadcasting company in Korea by intervening in the broadcasting personnel's right to produce news in accordance with the government's taste.

In particular, the pro-conservative media tendency was prominent in the conservative regimes' promoting the policies. When conservative media companies faced economic difficulties, their needs for advertising and sponsorship increased tremendously. There were many mutual interchanges between them, such as the government's public relations budget being spent on the advertising budget. In this regard, some reasons why the government abolished the Government Information Agency [GIA] were regarded as political friction with the previous regime and budget cut. However, the Lee government was criticised because of the reason that unlike the plan to reduce public relation budget by abolishing GIA at the beginning of the Lee regime, the policy promotion budget of the Lee government rather increased, compared to the Roh government.

"Although the Roh government formed the basic framework of online public relations, it tended to retreat much from the Lee government. 'State Affairs Briefing (Kukjeong Briefing)' changed into 'Policy Briefing (Jeongchaek Briefing)'⁴¹ and PCRM became obsolete. In addition, there was a considerable

⁴¹ <http://www.korea.kr/main.do>

reduction in the workforce for related tasks.” (Lyn, B. T., a previous civil servant from the GIA, 26 September 2017)

Furthermore, the Lee government mainly spent a large amount of the policy promotion budget on some conservative media. In particular, the Lee government spent a considerable amount of budget to promote its main projects such as the “Four Major Rivers Restoration Project” and “Media Law”. Given that, it can be considered that the conservative government mainly focused on one-sided advertorials rather than public relations at that time. However, it seemed that the government had not yet established a public relations view. As a result, it seems that public campaigns were evaluated as a means of propaganda rather than mutual communication as the governmental society put an emphasis on outputs and visible performances.

“The benefits of online advertising for promotion the ‘Four Major Rivers Restoration Project’⁴² appeared to be attributed Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Ilbo, DongA Ilbo and some of the conservative Internet media. The state audit data revealed that the government’s online advertising was only executed by conservative media.” (Pressian.com, 5 October 2009⁴³)

“In terms of communication phenomenon under the Lee government, even though the model of Public Relations (PR) is provided in the four different stages: Publicity model, Public information model, Two-way asymmetrical model, and Two-way symmetrical model. It could be evaluated that the level of

⁴² The project is designed to address the significant environmental challenges faced by the Han, Nakdong, Geum and Yeongsan rivers in Korea (Cha et al. 2011). It is a part of the Korean government’s Green New Deal stimulus for creating jobs and boosting a slumping economy through green initiatives (Woo 2009; Jun & Kim 2011: 217).

⁴³ Chae, E. H. (2009). “Jeon Byung-Hun ‘Why Lee government abolished the GIA?’ - Publicity budget increased by 1.3 times, more than 30 per cent of the budget spent on promoting ‘Four Major Rivers Project’ and ‘Media Laws’” (*in Korean*)
<http://www.pressian.com/news/article.html?no=59480>

the Korean government's communication with the public did not reach the second stage. While the Roh government recognised the importance of public communication and introduced various evaluation systems, the Lee government seemed to use those systems in different ways from original intentions. Although the budget for governmental communication had increased, it did not enhance its right function, but used politically.” (Cho, J. Y., a CEO of a Korean PR agency for the government, 28 September 2017)

6.4.3.3. Digital communications of the consecutive conservative regimes

With the prevalence of the digital communication platforms, including SNS channels since the late 2000s, new information flow emerged in policy communication of the government. The diverse digital activities of the public in the civil society, such as searching information and consuming news through the portal sites and participating in the discussion rooms on digital spaces, have considerably influenced the direction of the government's policy communication and forms of interaction (MCST 2012: 64). In this vein, the Korean government had to take measure to utilise diverse digital media, including SNSs that emerged as a dominant means of communication among the ordinary people.

The Lee government focused on digital media as an important communication tool. By the rapidly developed digital environment, the Lee regime specifically focused more on new media policies and operation by appointing Kim Chul-kyun, who used to be a secretary of Public Communication as a secretary of New Media. However, during Lee's presidential period, there were many staggering political and social issues, such as U.S. mad cow disease surge and its related candlelight vigils, the global financial

crisis, the ‘Cheonan’ Shipbreaking. The government, which had failed to respond to unexpected political incidents appropriately, tried to catch the social issues among the people in civil society through digital monitoring.

According to the public communication whitepaper written by the MCST (2012: 68-69), due to the political incidents, the government realised that the task of supporting accurate communication systems between the government and the public was more important than before. Furthermore, the Lee administration considered that the public opinions that were projected to virtual space on the Internet needed to be treated more quickly and appropriately (ibid). In this context, while the government regarded digital spaces of the people as places to be regulated, at the same time, it also tried to use digital communications effectively at the governmental level by making new attempts.

“Unlike mainstream journalism, digital platforms have an interactive nature that can form an alternative public sphere which provides more diverse themes and perspectives. Furthermore, digital communication has a considerable influence on agenda setting and public opinion formation.” (MCST 2012: 64)

In particular, the Lee administration established the principles and guidelines for the use of SNS for civil servants in Ministries in August 2011. At the same year, the government operated a representative SNS account ‘Policy Sympathy⁴⁴’, and the other ministries systemically used SNS channels. Moreover, in that time, Oh and Larson (2011: 106-108) argue that “Smartphone shock” that rippled through the nation’s ICT sector offers a powerful illustration of the challenge posed for Korea by digital convergence” (Larson & Park 2014: 354). With the proliferation of mobile devices, the

⁴⁴ <https://blog.naver.com/hellopolicy>

government also set up the master plan for ‘Mobile E-government’ in 2010 and the plan for promoting Smart E-government in 2011, respectively (MOIS 2017: 100).

However, despite the various efforts, there are also evaluations that overall, the new media policies and devices for digital communication systems under the Lee administration were not effective. Firstly, based on conservative political ideology, the Lee administration tended to focus on unilateral policy promotion and dismantled the existing infrastructure for communication with the people. Secondly, digital communication systems were mainly used to reinforce the opinions of internal directors in the government rather than communicate with the public. The governmental civil servants did not exchange information with the public, but only communicated within themselves. Thirdly, although there were needs for advertising campaigns to improve public perception and lead to public participation, the government mainly tended to deliver one-sided information to the public. Fourthly, the government tended to be busy coping with the social resistance movement rather than communicating with the people. Consequently, during the Lee regime it was regarded that public opinion and communication tended to be easily distorted.

Turning to the Park Geun-hye regime, the administration tried to improve the feasibility, expertise and security of government resource management by introducing “Government 3.0” in 2013, which is a new paradigm of government operations that places the utmost emphasis on efforts to provide customised services to citizens. With the “Government 3.0”, the Park government spread administrative management into the entire administrative structure. In general, it is regarded that the digital administrative system has provided citizens with a more extended range of access to public information. In this context, it can be considered that the “Government 3.0” by the Park

government is in line with the Roh Moo-hyun regime's e-government policies in that both policies' objects focus on providing customised services to the public.

"It was actually the final version on a supplier side in that the government has to disclose their information as well as a way of the expansion of access to information that was not allowed to be opened in off-line in the early 2000s using digital technology." (Um, M. J., a senior researcher from the STEPI, 22 September 2017)

The critical values of "Government 3.0" are opening, sharing, communication and cooperation, which are related to democratic values. If the democratic society presupposes openness and transparency, it can also be said that opening the government based on the concept of 'open government' has an impact on expanding democracy. Given the fact that the public information should be given on an equal basis to the people in a democratic society, it can be said that the Park government contributed to securing the public right to know the public information through the "Government 3.0" oriented towards openness. In addition, it guaranteed the people's rights to know about what the governments have done, are doing, and will do for them through the government's sharing of public information. Considering that transparency of the governmental information contributes to democratisation, it is regarded that Korea achieved an expansion of democracy in terms of openness of information to some extent.

"Opening, sharing, and communicating are the values that must be maintained even if the regime changes and these core values should not change regardless of time. In addition, I believe that at the government's perspective, the digital administrative services helped to increase the public's reliability on the

government.” (Choi, H. W., a senior researcher from the KLRI, 11 September 2017)

However, these impressive outputs seemed incompatible with the closed atmosphere of communication with the public during the Park regime. President Park was notorious as a leader who did not communicate with the people as well as with the press. In fact, the government’s digital platforms during this time were regarded as only spaces that merely provided administrative services, which focused on efficiency and transparency rather than a platform for communication. In the period of her regime, Cheong Wa Dae tended to be closed almost all the time, which is opposite to the time when the Roh regime’s ‘Participatory Government’ was taking power. Nevertheless, the expansion of the government’s use of diverse digital channels continued during her regime. However, it seems not because of her realising the importance of public communication, but because of the continuously developing digital communication environment regardless of politics.

To sum up, the new conservative governments from 2008 to 2017 have experienced substantial social transition due to the rapid digital media transformation. They had to catch the changes in society, and at least they tried to follow the social changes by increasing digital communication channels. However, some Korean critics evaluate that they enforced public communication policies in the opposite direction to the rapidly evolving digital media environment. Although the conservative governments seemingly tried to make an effort to improve policies, increase digital communication channels and enhance openness and transparency through public information disclosure, they actually did not seem to want to communicate with the people directly.

“In conservative governments, new media techniques were introduced to governmental communications, but they were rarely used. Both conservative regimes did not try to create communication platforms. Their attempts to communicate with the public were considerably reduced. The use of digital media was mainly advanced in an administrative service level.” (Song, K. J., an academic in Korea, 27 September 2017)

“Korea has procedurally achieved democratisation, but it has been regressed in the conservative regimes. It may be due to the personal nature of the political leaders or other factors.” (Kim, M. K., an academic in Korea, 18 September 2017)

6.4.4. Return of the progressive regime, Moon Jae-in government (2017-the present)

Wring (2005) argues that governments have to consistently engage in communication with the public to obtain political support. However, it is regarded that the new Korean conservative regimes did not provide the people with adequate digital spaces to form a public sphere enabling deliberative communications among ordinary Koreans. In this vein, the Korean conservative regimes’ directions and strategies of digital communication seemed not to have been successful in gaining public support. In contrast, compared to the previous consecutive conservative regimes, President Moon Jae-in (2017-present) showed a more open communication tendency and oriented towards public participatory communication philosophy.

6.4.4.1. Direct communication with the public through digital platforms

The Moon government applied public participation philosophy, which started with the opposition of dictatorship to the government's communication initiatives. While the previous regimes focused on unilateral delivery or openness of information, the present government seems to emphasise direct mutual interaction with the people. As a successor of progressive regimes, it can be regarded that the current Moon government is also trying to enhance 'participatory democracy' the same as the previous progressive regimes. In order to achieve this political goal, the present government is considered to use digital communication actively. In this vein, it seems that the characteristics of the Moon government's public communication through digital media changed from one-way policy promotions and information delivery to direct interactions with ordinary people.

The national communication systems that focus on receiving public voices through various digital platforms are extensively being carried out under the Moon government. First of all, Cheong Wa Dae commenced the running of a website called 'Gwanghwamun 1st Avenue (Gwanghwamun Ilbun-ga)⁴⁵', which is a digital forum that focuses on dialogue and discussion so that anyone can participate in the forum through pre-application from May 2018. Through this channel, policy debates about the topic designated by the government are held bi-weekly. In addition to this, 'Civil complaints 24 (Minwon 24)⁴⁶' which is a government-run electronic civil service (The 'Minwon 24' was integrated into a governmental representative web page, called 'Government 24 (Cheongbu 24)' on 23 July 2017) mainly handles online legal civil complaints. It

⁴⁵ It was created by the Moon Jae-in government to provide opportunities for individual citizens to participate in government policy directly. It has been rapidly built and operated with limited functions because of the early launched of the Moon government in 2017
<https://www.gwanghwamoon1st.go.kr>

⁴⁶ <https://www.gov.kr/portal/main>

provides a guide to more than four thousand legal-related complaints. Once a complaint comes in through this website, a relevant department/division designates a person who will take charge of solving it.

It can be said that the Moon government provided people with a few digital spaces for making them express their opinions and discuss social issues. Among diverse digital channels, the Moon government has newly introduced the ‘National Petition (Kukmin Cheongwon)⁴⁷’, which is the government’s official public petition website. The character of the National Petition (Kukmin Cheongwon) is also evaluated as “The result of a combination of characteristics of the current SNS era and Agora on the Daum portal site which were PC communication and online discussion boards” (Kukmin Ilbo, 17 August 2018⁴⁸).

“Like Agora during the Lee government, the digital space that the present government provides can make the social issues, which traditional media and existing political forces did not focus on, be paid attention, and furthermore can procedurally lead them to enter the public debates.” (Kim, M. H., a political commentator, Kukmin Ilbo, 17 August 2018⁴⁹)

The ‘National Petition (Kukmin Cheongwon)’ page has similar characteristics to the ‘e-People (Kukmin Sinmungo)⁵⁰’, which was created under the Roh regime in 2006. Currently, the ‘National Human Rights Commission of Korea [NPRC] (Kukka Ingwon

⁴⁷ <http://www1.president.go.kr/petitions>

⁴⁸ Cho, H. S., Park, S. E., & Kwon, J. H. (2018). “Cheong Wa Dae, ‘Kukmin Cheongwon (National Petition)’ 1 year, ‘Political Participation’s New Chapter’ and Its Side Effects” (*in Korean*) <http://news.kmib.co.kr/article/view.asp?arcid=0923994597&code=11131100&cp=nv>

⁴⁹ Cho, H. S., Park, S. E., & Kwon, J. H. (2018). “Cheong Wa Dae National Petition 1 year, ‘Political Participation’s New Chapter’ and Its Side Effects.” (*in Korean*) <http://news.kmib.co.kr/article/view.asp?arcid=0923994597&code=11131100&cp=nv>

⁵⁰ ‘Kukmin Sinmungo’, the Korean name of “e-People”, means “Drum for the people”, which originated from a drum hung in front of the royal palace so that people can beat the drum to file a complaint directly to the king in the Joseon Dynasty 600 years ago. <https://www.epeople.go.kr/jsp/user/UserMain.jsp>

Wiwonhoe)⁵¹, runs the ‘e-People (Kukmin Sinmungo)’ webpage by dealing with general complaints or suggestions, and policy discussion. However, the ‘National Petition (Kukmin Cheongwon)’ has a significant difference from the ‘e-People (Kukmin Sinmungo)’ channels in that Cheong Wa Dae is the supreme authority that manages the digital channel and answers to the people directly.

‘Kukmin Cheongwon (National Petition)’

The Moon government created the communication channel on its official webpage on 17th August 2017, commemorating 100 days of the establishment of the new government. Launching the Korean petition website started from the idea of Lim Jong-seok who is the present chief of the secretariat in Cheong Wa Dae, with the full support of President Moon Jae-in who has emphasised direct communication with the people. In fact, the Korean government modelled the system on ‘We The People’, which is the online petition website in the U.S. However, the Korean system is different from the one in the U.S. in that it does not have the people register on the petition website, but enables them to access it using their own SNS accounts. Furthermore, Cheong Wa Dae provides official answers to specific petitions that gain more than 200,000 signatures within 30 days, which is shorter than within 60 days of the U.S. system. Through this official channel, people who have the right to vote can relatively easily express their opinions about policy issues through digital media. Regarding this, the government specified some requirements for the petitions posted by the public on the ‘Kukmin Cheongwon (National Petition)’ below.

⁵¹ <https://www.humanrights.go.kr/site/main/index002>

1. *A petition with profanities may be removed by the administrator.*
2. *A violent and sexually explicit petition may be removed by the administrator.*
3. *A petition containing harmful material to youth may be removed by the administrator.*
4. *Petitions that are duplicated with the same content by the same user may be 'hidden' or deleted, leaving only the first petition.*
5. *A petition cannot be modified or deleted once it is created. This is a measure to protect the opinions of the first petitioners by preventing them from being changed by others.*
6. *A petition containing false facts or defamatory statements may be hidden or removed by the administrator.*

*The petitions are categorised into 17 sections: (1) political reform, (2) diplomatic/unification/defense, (3) jobs, (4) the future, (5) growth engines, (6) agricultural fishing villages, (7) health and welfare, (8) childcare/education, (9) safety / the environment, (10) low fertility / aging measures, (11) administration, (12) pets, (13) transportation/architecture/land, (14) economic democratisation, (15) Human right /gender equality, (16) culture / arts / sports / media, and (17) others (Nocut News, 29 October 2017⁵²). The progress of this public petition on the web channel to date is shown in **Appendix 7**.*

In this official public petition website, Koreans can freely share their ideas about what they want to request from the government, and in this process, they can form a public sphere by expressing their agreement with the petitions of others. In other words, through the government's official digital channels for direct communication

⁵² Kim, S. Y. (2017) "Cheong Wa Dae's National Petition, a benchmark case of White House's 'We The People'" (in Korean)
<http://www.nocutnews.co.kr/news/4868061>

with the people, the ordinary people have a place where they can easily express their opinions, and the government can hear many social problems that have not attracted societal attention. In this sense, some advocates maintain that the Moon government has tried to provide the ordinary people with the digital space to share their opinions freely, which actually encourages the people to be interested and participate in politics. Furthermore, it can also mean that the government tries to proactively prevent anti-government forces or various social issues that can be voluntarily created due to the formation of public opinion by providing the public with official digital spaces.

However, considering the present government's operation of diverse digital channels, some critics point out that the current government's active digital communication also engenders some social problems. The 'National Petition (Kukmin Cheongwon)' has dysfunction that the public voices that need to be paid attention and have to be dealt with, as social issues rather may not be noticed due to indiscrete petitions. In addition to this, false facts or contents due to anonymity on the digital public space obviously obstruct democratic digital communication (Economic Review, 25 April 2018⁵³). In this vein, some observers argue that this is because the digital communication spaces that the government created and provided are operated based on too simple communication mechanism, like the SNS channels.

Given the digital communication mechanism, which can be seen in the operation of the 'National Petition (Kukmin Cheongwon)', it can be easily noticed that the government prioritises the majorities' opinions and focuses on resolving them preferentially. In this regard, there is a point of view seeing the 'National Petition (Kukmin Cheongwon)' as a place of incitement rather than communication (Maeil

⁵³ Choi, J. H. (2018). "Cheong Wa Dae's 'National Petition', is this okay?" (*in Korean*) <http://www.econovill.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=336594>

Business News Korea, 23 May 2018⁵⁴). Although it has a function to collect diverse public opinions directly, it may not be a proper tool to shape digital public spheres yet. However, against these concerns, Jung Hye-seung, who is the new media secretary of the Korean government, says “There is no reason for the ‘National Petition (Kukmin Cheongwon)’ not to become a playground for the people” (News1, 30 May 2018⁵⁵).

To sum up, it can be said that the current Moon government has been making various attempts to encourage people’s political participation through digital platforms. However, there are concerns that, while the simple and convenient digital communication procedure may encourage public participation, it cannot enhance social deliberation among the public. While the government-run digital communications have the potential to increase public participation, it may not guarantee enhancement of any kind of democracies such as participatory or representative democracies in current Korean society. In this vein, it seems that the dysfunction of the government’s digital communication still needs to be examined by measuring gain and loss in Korean society.

6.4.4.2. The present government organisations’ digital communications

In order to make communication between the government and the people more democratic, various factors should be considered, and ultimately, they need to be met. Firstly, all citizens to enable democratic communications should share public information. Secondly, there should not be restrictions on the presentation of various opinions by the public based on sharing and accessing information freely. Thirdly, in

⁵⁴ Ryu, Y. W. (2018). “‘National Petition’, A place of incitement rather than communication” (*in Korean*) <http://news.mk.co.kr/newsRead.php?year=2018&no=327170>^[17]

⁵⁵ Na, H. Y. (2018). “Cheong Wa Dae, ‘There is no reasons that the National Petition cannot be a Playground’” (*in Korean*) <http://www.news1.kr/articles/?3331288>

the decision-making processes, a certain consensus needs to be reflected in the government's affairs as well as policies through communication with the public. To do this, the political actors including both politicians and civil servants have to make a lot of efforts to listen to the voices of the citizens first and show the public their efforts to reflect the publics' opinions for administrative work including decision-making processes.

Considering the government's communication developmental process, digital media communication of the government seems to play important roles to increase the openness of the government's communication process and promote information accessibilities. In addition, digital communication of the governmental organisations can be regarded as an effective means to approach the people more often and easily based on a two-way communication mechanism. On the one hand, by operating their own digital channels, the present governmental organisations directly deliver the contents they exactly want to send to the people. On the other hand, they also focus on the publics' voices through digital communicative platforms, including SNSs in various ways.

In this vein, it seems that at present, each ministry under the Moon regime actively run digital communication channels to handle the public's claims and requests. Indeed, the Korean governmental organisations' communication through diverse digital channels, including SNSs, which are useful for making issues, information delivery, and formation of relations, has expanded to the public sectors. While departments in charge of public relations and public communications in the central ministries in the past provided the people with public information and services only through mass media, the present ones can deliver messages and services tailored to the users' different levels due to the diversity of media. More specifically, the present governmental organisations

run various channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Kakao Story⁵⁶, YouTube and blogs and their usages of these digital platforms are also based on different strategies, purposes, and different targeted customers for each channel.

“There are two strategies either to adapt the contents to a specific channel appropriately or to process the same contents differently through channels. Since the users’ characteristics of each channel are various, the strategies for each channel must be set up differently. For example, according to statistical data, Facebook is for middle-aged men, Instagram is for young women, and Kakao Story is for middle-aged women.” (Yang, S. O., a civil servant from Seoul City Hall, 20 September 2017)

“We are setting up different strategies for each digital channel because its appealing points are all different. Participation events are being held to raise awareness of new national tasks and sub-tasks. In addition to this, while it cannot be announced to the press before a detailed plan of a policy set up, even before the plan is made it can be promoted through digital channels in order to raise public awareness.” (Moon, K. M., a civil servant from the MOE, 13 September 2017)

Considering the interview data with the present civil servants in the new media communication departments, it can be noticed that the government organisations have specific strategies for digital communication with the public. All the ministries open policy-related information that the people should know and key policies to the public, such as administrative services. As most policies are delivered through digital

⁵⁶ Kakao Story is a social network platform launched by Kakao. It was launched on 22 March 2012 as a photo-sharing network but has then expanded to include others features allowing users to post various things on their page. (source: *Wikipedia*)
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KakaoStory>

promotions with simple language and visual effects, the public can more easily understand the information about the government's policies. In this sense, digital channels can be regarded as useful tools rather than rigid traditional media in emotionally approaching the people to let them accept policies.

Furthermore, the government organisations' digital media communications can help people to be notified about new policies that they do not recognise, such as new national affairs. Although press releases including online articles may have sufficient information of the policies announced by the government, it is still difficult for the public to understand the government's intentions entirely and there would be some who do not accept them easily. In this case, governmental organisations' communication through their own digital channels can help those people who have difficulties understanding governmental services and policies.

“Traditional media do not tend to deliver lifestyle information because they mostly focus on political issues. However, due to the emergence of digital media channels, the governmental communication structure appealing the specific information could be built up. In addition, when people miss some information in relation to policies, governmental organisations can deliver the missed information through their own digital channels. Through new media platforms, various information with regard to political issues and specific policies can be provided in a more colourful way.” (Oh, Y. S., a senior civil servant from the MSIT, 21 September 2017)

“The first objective of online policy promotion is to describe a basic meaning of policies and deliver correct information about them. We also try to create familiar visual images of policies and the organisation and encourage people to

participate in online events. In fact, a range of policy information that can be delivered through newspapers or broadcasting is limited. However, online channels can expand the range of information we can deliver.” (Kang, B. R., a civil servant from the MOIS, 29 July 2017)

In the meantime, through interviews with the present civil servants, it was also identified that the government officials regularly monitor the citizens’ reactions on the online channels and take action on their feedback. Since it is possible for the public to access governmental messages due to mobile platforms in real-time, they can easily upload whenever and whatever they want to express through their own digital platforms. By doing so, once the public puts comments on the official websites or SNSs, civil servants in charge of dealing with them also can put replies under the public comments. Given that, the government’s digital communication with the public is regarded as a quite interactive tool in certain aspects. Regarding this, some present civil servants more accurately explain how they operate digital platforms in terms of interaction with the people below.

“We try not to ignore the voices of the people and give them feedback as much as possible. We operate an online policy proposal system and try to provide feedback to the public regardless of whether the opinions are available or not. We also take many proactive actions to encourage the public to take part in policy-relevant events, running supporters, and public hearings. We run online channels (‘Say to minister’ etc.) on the main webpage to hear their voices and monitor them at any time.” (Kim, D. H., a senior civil servant from the MOIS, 29 July 2017)

“We process the public opinions within a certain period and even evaluate the results of the public relations actions as well as receive complaints from time to time.” (Oh, Y. S., a senior civil servant from the MSIT, 21 September 2017)

From the government’s perspective, the performance of digital communications can be regarded as more significant in the democratic context. The purpose of the government operating these digital communication channels could be to provide ordinary people with virtual places where they can express their ideas and debate opinions in relation to policy issues freely. Through the digital channel operation, the government encourages the public to exercise sovereignty and is encouraging their participation in politics. In this vein, the government’s digital communication has the potential to strengthen transparency and accountability by directly interacting with people through digital media.

However, some observers argue that the reason why governmental organisations began to use digital platforms as tools for public communication is merely that digital communication is a social phenomenon. There is also criticism that although the digital channels are robust and widespread communication tools, the primary purpose of the governmental communication using digital media is still regarded as not the mutual interactions with the people, but the dissemination of accurate information. Indeed, despite the interactive nature of some digital communicative platforms, it is still regarded that only a limited number of people are participating in the policy debates of the digital forums. Considering this, it seems inevitable to complement the weakness of the Korean government’s digital communications and prepare for institutional supports.

“I believe that the current government tends to put more emphases on communication with the people by using digital platforms. However, there is

still a lack of many things to build up a constructive relationship with the people.” (Lee, J. M., a civil servant from the MCST, 13 September 2017)

6.4.4.3. Impacts of the government’s digital communications on direct, participatory democracy

There were not many proper institutional tools for the public to deliver their opinions and exercise political influence in Korea. So far, it is considered that the people in Korea have been treated like sovereigns only during the election campaigns. During the rest of the elected period, political representatives did not tend to care about the public voices. In addition, although political representatives and authorities in Korea are responsible for responding to the people’s voices, which is one of the critical elements of democracy, they have not been active in responding to the demands of the people. Moreover, considering the previous political experiences, the National Assembly in Korea usually tended not to communicate well with the people, rather it tended to pay more attention to the voices of interest groups on a partial basis.

In this regard, Ji (2018), a Korean sociologist argues that although procedural democracy such as the election system was guaranteed in Korea, it is still doubted whether or not the elected representatives gather the people’s opinions and reflect them into policies in running the state administration (EBS FM, 31 May 2018⁵⁷). Regarding this, it can be said that the Korean political system's limitation shows the weakness of representative democracy in Korea. However, the present government’s digital communication can be regarded as a kind of complementary device for society to compensate for the weakness of representative democracy. In this vein, the Korean

⁵⁷ Ji, J. H. (2018). “Communication between the government and the people, the social meaning of the National Petition.” (*in Korean*)
<https://sociologyku.blog.me/221291072173>

government's direct communication with the public through digital media is evaluated to play an instrumental role in increasing people's awareness of democracy by providing people digital spaces to share their opinions and participate in politics.

Communications both between the government and the public and among the ordinary people in society contribute to the development of democracy. In democratic societies, the public should be able to freely express their opinions on public matters and participate in discussions. Furthermore, if the people's political efficacy increases by appealing to their opinions in the process of governmental decision-making based on sharing and accessing information freely, it can be assumed that people more actively pay attention to politics and express their opinions. In this context, it is an important fact that the agenda-setting function that the mass media were in charge of entirely has been transferred to the public to some extent through digital communications.

"At present, as governmental organisations use digital media that enable mutual communications in real-time, they have to set digital communication strategies considering the reactions of the citizens. I think the government seems to recognise that it is necessary to have a look at the reactions of the public. It seems that the government's perception of the citizens changed. It is inevitable that the government should ask and listen to the opinions of the people." (Choi, C. W., a civil servant from the MCST, 13 September 2017)

Considering the present Korean government's digital communication operations and strategies, it seems obvious that government organisations are trying to enhance two-way communications with the people. Governmental digital media communication can be regarded as an effective means to enhance democratic values that the government has to meet by enhancing direct and participatory democracy. Regarding

this, Veit and Huntgebruth (2013: 31) particularly argue that digital democracy enables more direct democratic elements in representative democracies. Moreover, the fact that progressive regimes actively promote public participation by using digital media also seems to demonstrate that digital communication is a tool to strengthen participatory democracy.

However, some critics claim that the current regime is rather undermining the value of parliamentary politics and representative democracy by focusing on direct communication with the public through digital media. In particular, many Korean observers argue that the principal-agent who should directly communicate with the people in the Korean political system is not the Cheong Wa Dae (Blue House), but the National Assembly. Among them, Choi, an emeritus professor of politics at the Korea University, points out that SNSs and the Internet are replacing the role of political parties in Korean politics. He also points out that the Moon government's direct public communication through digital platforms can weaken representative democracy. (Munhwa.com, 27 July 2018⁵⁸).

Although the Korean government's digital communication is regarded to have the potential to support direct and participatory democracies, it is still doubted whether the mutual interactions between the government and the people through digital platforms are working in strengthening deliberation in Korean society. Regarding this, Barber (2001) raised concerns about this democratic mechanism of government's digital communication by arguing that while the horizontal, immediate communication capabilities of the digital media offer a participatory bent of direct democracy, they may not play a role for popular deliberation. Immediacy and interactivity, which are the

⁵⁸ Park, M. (2018). "Moon Jae-In administration's emphasis on direct democracy, Concerns about deterioration of representative democracy."
<http://www.munhwa.com/news/view.html?no=2018072701032921093001>

natures of digital media, are a virtue of participatory democracy, but it is also a democratic vice at the same time because conversation without sufficient deliberation can be undisciplined, prejudiced, private, polarising and unproductive. In light of Korean governmental communication through digital media, Barber's argument seems to be persuasive.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter observed the transformation of Korean governments' digital communications by political regime changes. According to the analysis at the political aspect, during the Korean regime changes the last twenty-five years each government that was in opposing political ideologies has shown different actions in relation to the digital communication with Koreans depending on the specific circumstance of digital media communication development. In particular, it was identified that there had been differences between progressive and conservative regimes in terms of communication with the public and digital media use.

In this vein, it can be regarded that the Korean government has taken different attitudes towards the opposing notions of democracies, which are participatory and representative democracies. It is acknowledged that while the progressive regimes actively used digital communications as useful tools to expand public participation, the conservative regimes rather tended not to focus on expanding public participation through digital communications but maintained friendly relations with existing conservative media. Considering the fact that the digital media use by these regimes differed depend on their political ideology, it can be regarded that digital communications have the potential to support participatory democracy in Korean society in the digital age, rather than representative democracy.

In the meantime, digital communications among the ordinary people in Korean society are regarded as an indispensable subject in understanding impacts on current social and political phenomena as well as democracy. It can be said that the complex societal, as well as political changes, have considerably affected democracy in Korea. Therefore, in the next chapter, that is the last empirical chapter, I will discuss the democratic implication of digital communication in Korean civil society by analysing the power relationship between the government and the citizens.

Chapter 7: Digital communications in the Korean civil society

7.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to understand digital communication in Korean civil society, regarding its related social uses and the government's reactions to these uses. To focus on solving research question 2-2 *“How has digital communication at the societal level affected democracy in Korea?”*, it examines how digital communication has disseminated in the Korean civil society and how the government has dealt with the dynamics of social uses of digital communication. More specifically, to explain the Korean democratisation at the level of the balance of power between the Korean government and citizens, it analyses the government's regulations of digital communications in civil society and citizens' active collective political actions. In this regard, through the case study, it demonstrates how the dynamic of social uses of digital tools and the government's reactions to them have affected the transformations of democracy in Korea. Finally, it aims to understand how digital communications among the ordinary people in Korea have impacted their political participation and the relationship with the government, and ultimately, the transformations of Korean democracy.

7.2. Contemporary political communications in Korean civil society

In present Korea, digital media become the main means for obtaining information and communicating with one another. Modern Koreans became easily connected to one another through digital technologies, and furthermore, they could

form their own digital political communication culture. In this vein, in the process of comprehending this societal transformation due to digital development in Korea, the level of what the people want from the government has changed and become diverse. Furthermore, as digital communication among the majority of Koreans increases in Korean society, it seems that the formation of the public's political participation has also significantly changed. To understand how political culture has developed in Korean society in the digital age, this section observes the transformation of Koreans' political communication and the public's political participation.

7.2.1. The early stage of the Korean digital society establishment

During the digital media period of transition, the digital-mediated culture in Korea has significantly developed in many ways, and the speed of spreading the emerged culture accelerated sharply. Prevalent societal and cultural bases in Korea, such as Internet cafés, digital computer game rooms (the so-called PC Bang, which means PC rooms), and web-community sites, were created due to the well-entrenched digital infrastructure. In the early days of digital culture formation, PC communication was only a leading culture for the early adopters, but on the whole, it was a subculture in Korea. The PC users formed communities in the virtual spaces, and they were composed of main semi-professionals. However, it did not take long until the majority of people in Korea were able to use digital devices and act as informatisation contributors.

Many scholars paid attention to the Korean digital culture and analysed its features. Choudrie and Lee (2004: 105) argue that the extensive use of the high-speed digital network has changed people's digital media usages. Fackler (2007) more explains explicitly that most Korean people spend their time on electronic devices for

many various reasons: playing online games, decorating their blogs, communicating with each other in Internet cafes or on mobile phones, connecting with groups relating to their hobbies or other interests through Internet portal sites, and exchanging audio-visual materials with other people (Lee 2012: 117). Due to the remarkable digital development, Koreans could form online communities and have more opportunities to communicate with other people about a variety of topics freely. In this context, knowledge and information of individuals gathered in digital spaces can create issues and discourses and affect the formation of new digital communication culture.

In the meantime, the progress of digitalisation and informatisation has caused a significant change to Korean society in terms of the political aspect. In particular, the changes in the way of communication in everyday life among ordinary people in Korea influenced their ways of political participation. Since the widespread presence of digital media, the present people in Korea can take part in politics by using digital platforms on computers and mobile devices. As participatory interactions of the people are becoming more prevalent through digital platforms in daily life, the political participation of citizens is continuously expanding in Korean society. Digital behaviours of the people have laid the foundation for massive collective intelligence, and this digital collective intelligence has expanded in economy, politics and society. In this vein, as the power of the individuals has been strengthened in the digital age, a new concept of ‘Smartizen (a compound word of ‘Smart’ and ‘Netizen’)’ has emerged (Kim 2011).

Regarding this, Lin et al. (2010) notably predicted that digital participation based on social networking would lead to the transformation of mobilising civic power when the time comes (Isin & Ruppert 2015: 84). While the power of the ordinary people used to be small, it can be considered that the use of digital media including mobile media has the potential to enhance that of individuals by enabling them to gather

and collaborate. In particular, by shaping collective political power using digital platforms, it seems that people can enhance their rights as citizens as well as develop strength against the strong power of political leaders. Regarding this, Diamond (2012) has dubbed ‘liberation technology’ that can ‘empower individuals, enable liberated communication and mobilisation and strengthen the basis of civil society (Fenton 2016b: 174).

7.2.2. The features of Koreans’ political participation in the digital age

According to Kim (2010a: 169-170), public participation can have the potential to make considerable contributions to the consolidation and deepening of democracies in various ways: (1) It helps to identify new social issues and interests that have been underestimated by the existing political forces; (2) It provides the public themselves with channels for self-expression; and (3) It lessens the public’s sense of political apathy or alienation. In the meantime, Heimans and Timms (2014) particularly distinguished the features between old and new political power formation: old political power is established by parties, interest groups and campaigns, but new power, based on the ordinary people, is more ‘open, participatory, and peer-driven’.

In the past, collective political participation of Koreans centred on closed and hierarchical membership networks such as associative political groups, parties and associations. However, the political participation types of Koreans were changed from traditional interest groups and party-centred political participation to digital network-based political participation that can potentially link to collective political actions. Depending on political and societal situations, Koreans have contributed to politics by voluntarily organising the public sphere or participating in sharing information and ideas. Indeed, during the political transformation process in the last few decades, it is

regarded that the civil society in Korea has been developed as social power and established a unique relationship with the state (Ryoo 2009).

Indeed, since the mid-2000s, diverse types of digital communication spaces have continuously appeared in Korean society from ‘Agora⁵⁹’ bulletin board, which was formed on a private portal site ‘Daum’, to the ‘Kukmin Sinmungo (e-People)⁶⁰’ and ‘Kukmin Cheongwon (National Petition)’ that the Korean government officially provides. Through these digital spaces, the people in Korea have been continuously questioned about the social injustice of the government and have discussed diverse social issues. In this regard, it can be regarded that the present-day Korean is no longer a passive member of the public who unconditionally follows one-way publicities, and Korean politics is facing a new phase.

Regarding this, focusing on digital participation of the public in Korea, Lee (2004c) more specifically sorted out the features of the political participation of the people in the present digital age into six elements: (1) direct action strategies, (2) loose communication via the digital networks, (3) loose ties, (4) horizontal organisation, (5) informal mode of belonging, and (6) identity politics. By classifying the forms of digital political participation (*Figure 18*), Lee (2004c) claims that political participation in the digital era is a multidimensional concept and the formation of the public’s political participation in the digital age also involves multidimensional changes in the level of social structure and political process and systems (ibid).

⁵⁹ The service has been halted on 7 January 2019.

⁶⁰ <https://www.epeople.go.kr/jsp/user/UserMain.jsp>

Figure 18. Types of digital political participation in Korea

	Types of Participation	Contents of Political Participation	Specific Digital Spaces
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition and use of political information • Formation of political opinions (Expression of opinions) • Information retrieval and recognition on political issues • Individual deliberation, opinion formation, and expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact and sharing political and policy related information • E-voting • Policy proposal • E-mail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • Political parties • Politicians • Media • Portal sites
Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political conversations and discussions • Political collective actions (Online Behaviourism) • Collective discussions and Public opinion formation • Collective decision-making and execution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda setting and public opinion formation • Cyber demonstration (Online protest visit) • E-voting • Political campaigns • Participation of civic societies • Candlelight demonstrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Political webzine ▪ Media company websites ▪ Civic groups

Source: The typology was translated and modified from “The Internet and Political Participation: Korea’s Experience” by Lee, W. T. from the KISDI (2004c)(in Korean)

7.2.3. Extension of public participation through digital communication in Korea

It can be regarded that the connective nature of digital media provides digital media users in society with opportunities to form a public sphere more freely. Regarding this, Dahlgren (2001: 52-3) maintains that digital communication can offer opportunities for motivated and improve the public sphere to ordinary people. Furthermore, Stoker (2006: 202) argues that the mutual connection based on advanced digital technology provides an opportunity for ‘organisational hybridity, mixing and switching between repertoires associated with political parties, social movements and interest groups’. Due to the advanced digital communication technology, ordinary people in the present era can act as a journalist by expressing their political opinion and

delivering their own ideas (Gripsrud & Eide 2010: 25) and forming a public sphere on digital platforms.

During recent decades, Korean digital society has shown the operation of the public sphere on digital spaces at various levels and systems. Korean people, as members of society, have not only actively expressed their opinions through digital communication, but also experienced organising and implementing collective political actions. In particular, the collective actions of the public for various social and political issues began to appear in Korea since the early 2000s, when the Internet began to spread rapidly through society. After the preliminary concurrence process through digital communication, the people proactively gathered to express their political demands by organising and participating in collective political movements such as candle vigils on the streets. By actively taking part in collective actions on the streets, they seemed to exert power as citizens.

More recently, mass political protests have been occurring in Korea using digital platforms such as SNSs as a means of expression, dissemination of information, organising and mobilisation. Considering the various political actions, it seems that ordinary people in Korea moved away from the existing hierarchical relationship where they obeyed the elite power and began a public rebellion. It can be considered that Korean political participation has been led by autonomous individuals or “Smart mobs⁶¹”, which is fluid and unpredictable. Regarding this, Dahlgren (2001: 47) maintains that Koreans tend to be connected to one another not just to have a conversation but also to achieve political goals. In this context, Stoker (2006: 201) argues, “The significance of these kinds of political actions in the digital age is that they are bringing in a new era of politics.”

⁶¹ Harper et al. (2005: 209). “The term refers to the enhanced ability of group of people to coordinate and cooperate based on digital communication (Rheingold 2002)”

Meanwhile, Tai (2007) claims, “Civil society tends to be evolved from a corporatist and vertical structure to a more horizontal and autonomous” (Jorba & Bimber 2012; Anduiza et al. 2012: 28). The social networking mechanism can contribute to the formation of a relatively equal basis communication system by giving the people equal opportunities in terms of accessibility. Through these processes of the social movements that took place through digital communication, “The citizen politics has become issue-led and decentralised (Dahlgren 2009: 32)” (Houston 2016: 2). The horizontal politics based on public participation through digital communication also allows for “the reformulation of identities and the formation of plural communities (Graham & Khosravi 2002)” (Jorba & Bimber 2012; Anduiza et al. 2012: 28).

“Digital media may provide people with information on an equal basis. This can be understood as a concept of equality caused by tools. For example, as in the era of Western pioneering, the people became equal by possessing guns, the present people can be equal by using digital media in terms of obtaining information.” (Moon, K. M., a civil servant from the MOE, 13 September 2017)

7.3. The evolution of Koreans’ collective actions in the digital age

During the past twenty-five years, various political collective actions by the people that were organised through digital communication have occurred in Korean society. Now, Korea is regarded as a representative state where members of society pursue political objectives by using digital networking system. The procedure of digital communications and political behaviours among citizens can be regarded as a critical part of the democratisation process. In this vein, Hauben and Markoff (2005) argue that the practice of expanding democracy through digital media, which has been proceeding

since the 2000s, would bring about the qualitative development of the previous concept of citizenship and democracy. Given that, this section deeply investigates some historical examples in Korean society that can be viewed in regard to this argument.

7.3.1. Conversion of public collective actions into the political arena

Back in 2002, large-scale civic collective actions in Korea were not actually initiated as a means of a political purpose but began with an entertainment nature. The first Korean collective actions since the millennium era began with a festive atmosphere when they occupied the streets with celebrating the World Cup, which had obviously nothing to do with political affairs (Hauben & Markoff 2005; Han 2016). During the World Cup games in June 2002, the Red Devils, an online fan club, organised street cheering events through PC communication. The people who received the information voluntarily participated in the event. This social phenomenon has shown that the ideas of the ordinary people shared on digital spaces could be turned into reality. In addition, it is regarded that the fact that people had successful and inspiring social experiences of these collective actions affected the following collective actions that happened due to political and social issues in Korean society.

This new social phenomenon in Korea shifted a political matter quickly. During the World Cup in July 2002, there was ‘an incident where a U.S. armoured vehicle killed two Korean middle school girls’, Hyo-soon and Mi-sun. Regarding this accident, the commander of the U.S. military expressed the regret, and the senior officials visited the memorial altar. They tried to resolve the situation by sending compensation to the victims’ families. However, it was not that simple to solve and became a diplomatic problem between Korea and the U.S. Although the U.S. military promised to hold talks with the commander after the funeral, they broke the promise of the meeting, using a

translation mistake as the excuse. The Ministry of Justice sent a request to the U.S. to recount their justification of the incident, but the U.S. military refused.

The citizens were outraged by the unequal relationship between Korea and the U.S., and they blamed the government's incompetence in handling the unfair situation. Based on this background, people over a wide age range expressed their indignation by having the first candlelight rally on the street as a collective action involved in a political issue. Thousands of Koreans demonstrated in the street in order to protest the verdict from the ROK Status of Forces Agreement [SOFA], which favoured the U.S. army. Ordinary people, including young students, joined the candlelight demonstrations to express their outrage, and it spread to fifty-six cities in Korea. In spite of the apology by the US president George. W. Bush and the expression of regret the Korean president Kim Dae-jung, the anti-U.S. sentiment of Koreans became more sparked due to the acquittal of the two U.S. military servicemen (BBC News, 3 December 2002⁶²).

In this vein, Lee (2004a) particularly argues that through this phenomenon, the Internet has shown that the general public can make the specific issue into major social issues without going through the traditional news media. According to him, the Hyo-soon and Mi-sun incident became a severe social issue since it began to be publicised through online news (ibid). Besides, since then, many other observers began to focus on the impact of online journalism, including major portal news that had an interactive function. Through this case, it was identified that the spread of information sharing through digital media among the ordinary people was quite considerable. Above all, this incident is meaningful in that it was the first transition from a collective action with celebratory characteristics to collective action with political intentions. More

⁶² BBC News. (2002). "Korea to rethink US forces accord"
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/2537677.stm>

importantly, it is important to be noted that since then, the digital interactivity of the people considerably began to influence Korean politics.

7.3.2. Digital media use as tools for political support

At the end of the same year when the incidents explained above took place, there was the 16th presidential election in Korea through which President Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) was elected. Roh's online campaigning for the 2002 presidential election worked to mobilise his supporters on digital platforms successfully (Hara & Jo 2007). At that time, mobilising the people through online communication was regarded as an effective method because the younger generations are the heavy Internet users and generally have more progressive tendencies than the older generations. The Roh's campaign team attempted to reach the voters by using the Internet. The online campaign was also a more cost-effective way that made it possible for tens of millions of people to be reached at a relatively low cost.

The 2002 presidential election was different from the previous elections that mobilised the voters by using a lot of money through off-line organisations. In particular, it is regarded that the Roh's presidential election campaign team successfully used online platforms to mobilise supporters and voters who were 20 to 30 years old at that time (Lee 2004a). More specifically, President Roh was elected with the support of young people who were Internet-savvy and were called as the "386" generations, which meant that they are in their thirties when the term was coined, who were university students in the 1980s, and were born in the 1960s (Larson & Park 2014: 353). Indeed, the 386 generations were regarded as the most politically active participants at that time. In this vein, the background to the birth of President Roh leadership can be regarded as a starting point for the civil mobilisation in Korean politics.

With the free-communicative nature of digital platforms, the presidential election campaigns could have been more like a festival based on voluntary participation. It can be regarded that the birth of the Roh government itself was possible because the election campaign proceeded during the time when the most active public sphere in terms of political issues was formed of various Internet political webzines and online media. In the meantime, during the presidential election campaigns, a big supporter's fan club was formed on the Internet space called 'Rohsamo', which means a group of people who love Roh Moo-hyun. The number of members, including Korean celebrities, reached more than 80,000 nationwide by the end of the 2002 presidential election. Compared to the fact that the number of President Lee's online fan club supporters was less than 10,000, the number of Roh fan club members is remarkable (Wolgan Chosun, November 2017⁶³). Consequently, it can be considered that as digital media were used in the political arena, the classical political behaviours of the people, including the election, began to change overall.

7.3.3. Conflicts between the Korean government and the public in the digital age

In early 2004, President Roh, who won the election with a successful election campaign, faced a severe political predicament a year after his inauguration. During Roh's presidential period, the opposition party with the reason that the president violated political neutrality initiated an impeachment proposal. This was the first impeachment proposal in the history of Korean politics. However, the people actively opposed the National Assembly's decision to impeach the president. On 12 March 2004,

⁶³ Kim, T. W. (2017). "Internet President 'Roh Moo-hyun, Moon Jae-in and the tragedy of comments' democracy'" (*in Korean*)
<http://pub.chosun.com/client/news/viw.asp?cate=C01&mcate=M1001&nNewsNumb=20171126740&nidx=26741>

candlelight vigils against the impeachment of President Roh were held, and they spread across the country. Many people actively expressed their opinions against the decision of the National Assembly by committing collective action (CBS, 30 April 2004⁶⁴). In the end, the Constitutional Court decided to reject the impeachment trial in May of the same year, and Roh could return to Cheong Wa Dae.

It seems that this political experience where the ordinary people in Korea achieved what they wanted by actively expressing their opinions and collaborating in demonstrations considerably affected their problem-solving ways in terms of the further subsequent social and political issues. In this regard, it could be considered that the people who had voluntarily organised and participated in political action could have gained more confidence in their collective political actions. However, since then, more conflicting political issues between the government and civil society have continuously occurred in Korea.

Turning to the Lee government, ‘the import of U.S. beef’ related to ‘mad cow disease’ emerged as a social issue that led to conflict between the government and the people in Korean society. It was a complicated issue related to public safety as well as an unfair treaty with the U.S. Although the Korean government had banned the import of U.S. beef since the U.S. Department of Agriculture officially announced the first case of mad cow disease, it decided to resume the import of U.S. beef through negotiations between Korea and the U.S., which caused many controversies (Fox News, 26 May 2008⁶⁵).

⁶⁴ Vries, L. (2004). “South Korean President Impeached” (30 April)
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/south-korean-president-impeached/>

⁶⁵ Fox News. (2008). “South Koreans Hold Candlelight Vigil Protesting Beef Import Deal with the U.S.” (6 May)
<https://www.foxnews.com/story/south-koreans-hold-candlelight-vigil-protesting-beef-import-deal-with-u-s>

Despite the government's public relations effort through conventional media such as broadcasting and print media to disseminate information about the safety of U.S. beef, it failed to gather the public's agreement, and it rather encouraged the public to take part in demonstrations. Moreover, the government's coercive actions seemed to result in the dissatisfaction of the public. It means that this political issue led to another big candlelight vigil as anti-Lee's government forces prevailed in online spaces including the bulletin boards of portal sites operated by private companies such as 'Agora'. In the end, it brought about a signature campaign for the impeachment of President Lee, drawing around one million public participants in May 2008 (Cho et al. 2012: 2).

Due to the extended range of Internet users, mad cow disease issue became more severe and expanded. During the Lee regime period, the people who have a wide range of social backgrounds in Korea tended to engage in interactions through digital media actively. In particular, due to the nature of digital communication, they seemed to have been used to more horizontal social interactions rather than traditional hierarchies. More importantly, regarding this incident, it needs to note that the involvement of the people, who were usually not interested in political issues, made this incident even more severe.

“New participant groups in the 2008 candlelight vigils, who greatly differed from the conventional agents of political movements, include the “high heel shoe band,” the “baby stroller brigades,” middle- or high-school-aged girls, members of Internet social clubs, and others. Many married women who were not previously interested in politics or social issues learned about the issue of American beef import and the ensuing street demonstrations through Internet social communities where they used to share common interests on topics such as

cosmetics, food, interior decoration, furniture, clothing, TV stars, etc. This social origin of new actors shows a fundamental change in the movement's characteristics." (Han 2010: 6)

Due to the expanded participation of the public through interactions among them on digital spaces, the Lee government realised that it was no longer possible to control Internet spaces properly, only 100 days after his inauguration. Against this backdrop, the Lee government became hostile to online civil society by making a number of policies to regulate free communication on the Internet. The government seemed not to meet the new digital generation's communicational demands but decide to stick to traditional communication strategies (Cho et al. 2012: 3). In this context, it is evaluated that the government did not understand the publics' needs and failed to cope with the social conflicts.

Regarding this, Cho et al. (2012) maintain that the reason why the Korean government failed to implements and promoted appropriate policies to address the widespread fear of mad cow disease adequately is the failure of the political communication strategies. According to them, it is "A failure to adequately adapt new communication strategies based on advanced digital technologies in the information age" (ibid: 1). In other words, the failure to resolve the conflict over the U.S. beef imports can be due to the distrust of the government resulting from its communication strategies through conventional media. Consequently, this political incident showed that the government's devaluation of civic participation, which was different from the traditional form of participation, could lead to an intense, widespread backlash (Kim 2012: 186).

Meanwhile, turning to the Park Geun-hye regime, there were continuous public demonstrations on the street to convey complaints about various social problems, such

as labour reform and Korean history textbook revision. In that time, the government tended to cope with the collective demonstrations of civil society with force. Until then, the characteristics of demonstrations in Korea seemed utterly different from those requesting the impeachment of President Park in peaceful conditions in late 2016. The demonstrations often showed the armed confrontation between the police under the government and the participants of the rallies. Among the demonstrations of the people during the Park government, there was a remarkable demonstration that was organised as an objection to the Park government's measures to 'further promote the casualisation of work, restrict trade union rights and undermine farmer's livelihoods through the Trans-Pacific Partnership'. Around four million participants took part in the public rallies, and the demonstrations were expanded to the issues such as trade unions, democratic demonstration and fundamental rights and civilian liberties (The International Union of Food... [IUF], 25 September 2016⁶⁶).

Among these demonstrations, there is a notable incident which raised controversies that the government used excessive force to quell the demonstration. During the first rally out of the three demonstrations, an old farmer, called Beak Nam-gi, was hit by a police water cannon trying to suppress the demonstration on 14 November 2015. While the government argued that his death was because of a chronic disease he suffered, the public and press continuously claim that his death was due to the government's over-repression. In the end, the farmer died ten months after the incident, but for a while, there were still controversies over the cause of his death for a while. Regarding this, The New York Times (25 September 2016⁶⁷) reported that "Maina Kiai,

⁶⁶ IUF. (2016). "Death of Korean rights activist farmer Baek Nam-gi, a victim of state violence" (*in Korean*)

<http://www.iuf.org/w/?q=node/5150>

⁶⁷ Choe, S. H. (2016). "Activist in South Korea dies of injuries from police water cannon" (*in Korean*) <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/26/world/asia/activist-in-south-korea-dies-of-injuries-from-police-water-cannon.html>

the special rapporteur at the United Nations on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, cited Mr Baek's case in criticising what he called an excessive use of water cannons by the police and shrinking space for exercising the right to peaceful assembly under Ms Park."

"The South Korean police deployed 679 buses and 19 water cannon trucks to surround and disperse protesters, reflecting President Park's renewed hardline about anti-governmental protests. Baek Nam-gi was hit in the head by the blast of a water cannon. Ten months after being struck unconscious by police water cannon on 14 November 2015 while protesting against the South Korean government's agricultural policies, the 69-year-old veteran political activist died in hospital on Sunday afternoon on 25 September." (Amnesty International Korea, 27 September 2016⁶⁸)

In this vein, it is also noteworthy in this incident that the daughter of Beak Nam-ki informed the people of the progress of the case by continually uploading the related information through her personal Twitter account. The incident could get attention from the traditional media as well as the ordinary people. However, the direct information delivery through digital media had an important meaning in that an individual can deliver the information that has not been distorted by the immense political power with a different perspective from the traditional press. Regarding this, it can be considered that the opinions of the related individuals on social issues could have a significant influence on the public opinion in the society where almost all the people in Korea use digital communicational platforms.

⁶⁸ Byun, J.P. (2016). "After South Korean farmer's death, family continues fight for justice" (*in Korean*) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/09/after-south-korean-farmers-death-family-continues-fight-for-justice/>

To sum up, considering these series of incidents that have taken place in Korea, we can notice that Koreans evolved their political behaviours by organising and participating in collective political actions through digital communications. Moreover, until the mid-2000s, SNSs having a feature enabling interactive communications among people was not a major political tool influencing the formation of public opinion. However, the public's use of digital media empowered individuals to face the governmental authority, which could not have been imagined in the authoritarian regime of the traditional media era. In this vein, it can be regarded that Koreans could have increasingly enhanced their rights as citizens in the political arena by experiencing a series of social phenomena in the digital age.

7.3.4. Establishment of the new political culture in Korean digital society

Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009) emphasise that political communication among the people is casually suffused throughout their digital lives rather than being confined by explicitly political settings (Jorba & Bimber 2012; Anduiza et al. 2012: 34). One of the new significant features of the collective public actions in the late 2000s was that women and young people played an active role as a driving force of the social movement, which is a significant change. In fact, women and the younger generation had not been active and so involved in political activities before the digital age (Park 2010).

Regarding this, many scholars argue that the role of digital technologies is effective in attracting and mobilising those groups of people in the political area (Hindman 2008: 10). According to Park (2010), they were a kind of 'newcomer' when joining the 'public sphere' in terms of public political participation. It seems not an awkward argument that the range of public participation was further expanded through

digital communication as people who were uninterested in politics in the past started to take part in collective political actions. In this context, a new term “Smart mob”, which describes a group whose coordination and communication abilities have been empowered by digital communication technologies, can refer to the active public in the current Korean society.

In particular, turning to the SNS era in the 2010s, Koreans began to share their political activities with multiple unspecified people by sharing photos that prove their political participation such as participating in elections or candlelight vigils through their personal SNS channels. On the political side, the people in Korea have voluntarily formed a collective-level smart mob through digital messaging and communicative platforms such as Kakao Talk⁶⁹, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. A representative example of the smart mob can be found recently in Korea: a series of candlelight demonstrations resulting from President Park’s scandal proceeded every weekend from November 2016 to March 2017, which was an unprecedented peaceful demonstration around the world. Millions of resentful citizens in Korea demonstrated with candlelight vigils on the streets demanding the resignation of President Park. The demonstrations lasted for nearly two months until legal action was carried out.

“The country’s (Korea) advanced information technology infrastructure made the difference. Smartphones turned front-line protesters into videographers. Millions commented on the political situation on Kakao Talk, Facebook and other social media channels.” (The New York Times, 14 September 2017⁷⁰)

⁶⁹ Kakao Talk is a free mobile instant messaging application for smartphones with free text and free call features. The app is also used by 93 per cent of smartphone owners in South Korea, where it is the number one messaging app. (*Wikipedia*)
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KakaoTalk>

⁷⁰ Chang, H. J. (2017). “South Koreans Worked a Democratic Miracle. Can They Do It Again?” (*in Korean*)
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/14/opinion/south-korea-social-mobility.html>

During the Park Chung-hee regime (1963-1979), Park Geun-hye had to adopt the role of first lady as a daughter of President Park since her mother passed away. However, when she became 18th president in Korea, the relationship with Choi Soon-sil, who had been a friend since she was the first lady, was implicated in the monopoly of government affairs. Although many Koreans hoped that President Park would rekindle the strong charisma of her father and settle the economic and security woes, she disappointed all the people in Korea by committing political scandal at the end of her regime. Since the scandal that was an unprecedented event in Korean political history, Park's public approval rate dropped to lower than 5 per cent and remained at an all-time low until the Constitutional Court officially announced her impeachment. In the end, Park was accused by the national assembly of extortion, bribery, abuse of power and leaking government secrets (The Guardian, 9 December 2016⁷¹), and finally resulted in her impeachment. Regarding this, The Guardian (10 March 2017⁷²) reports, "President Park is the most unpopular South Korean leader since the country became a democracy in the late 1980s."

"Much attention has been focused on the accusations of corruption involving Samsung and other Korean conglomerates, but these are just one indicator of the state of democracy in Korea under Park. Besides the implications of corruption between state and private interests, there are other indications of

⁷¹ McCurry, J. (2016). "South Korea impeachment vote: the key facts behind a presidential crisis" <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/09/south-korea-impeachment-vote-the-key-facts-behind-a-presidential-crisis>

⁷² McCurry, J. (2017). "Park Geun-hye: South Korean court removes president over scandal" <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/10/south-korea-president-park-Geun-hye-constitutional-court-impeachment>

insufficient checks on presidential power, particularly as it comes to freedom of expression.” (The Diplomat, 14 March 2017⁷³)

The demonstration requiring President Park’s impeachment was first started with a politician’s speech on the stage of the demonstration. But after that, it was mainly maintained by ordinary citizens, including high school students. These collective movements that the civic organisations and ordinary people proactively led were spread out over the country. In addition to this, since the candlelight vigils were conducted peacefully without conflicts with the public power such as the police, many parents brought their children to the spot of the demonstration in order for them to experience democratic civil movements. There were democratic political collective actions that were distinctly different from the democratisation movement thirty years ago.

In the meantime, during the rallies, people actively shared their political actions by SNSs, uploading personal opinions and photos proving their political actions. The number of people gathered in the square increased as the volume of posts on digital platforms did. Sharing opinions and photos contributed to form a democracy festival atmosphere that made people want to participate in the collective actions voluntarily. People gathered regardless of age and gender and expressed their will to change the existing regime that was causing confusion in state affairs.

“Recently seeing the candlelight vigils to request President Park’s impeachment, I thought that the influence of digital media, especially SNSs, was great. Compared to the past when some exclusive press media controlled public opinions, digital media have played a big role in allowing a variety of the

⁷³ Draudt, D. (2017). “The future of South Korean Democracy” <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/the-future-of-south-korean-democracy/>

opinions of ordinary members of this society to be expressed, shared, and come to an agreement much more freely.” (Lyn, B. T., a previous civil servant from the GIA, 26 September 2017)

In 2017, 17 million Korean people who took part in the candlelight protests received ‘the Ebert Human Right Prize’ for the success of the free and peaceful demonstrations and their contribution to world democracy. It was the first time that the people of a particular country received the prize since the human right foundation was established. Considering this, some observers indicate that the driving force for this kind of recent massive political collective action of the citizens in Korean society is social consensus through digital networking. It can be an example showing that ordinary people can voluntarily participate in the public social sphere on digital platforms and collaborate to carry out social change.

Korea became an unprecedented case proving that collective actions based on digital networking among the people can affect the change of the elected leader. Furthermore, it can be regarded as an accomplishment that the people themselves tried to express their political demands with senses of ownership, beyond merely giving a petition to the government. In this vein, it can be assumed that the Koreans’ awareness of democracy has grown through their active political participation and expression, including a series of social phenomena in terms of civic, political movements. Regarding this, Hauben and Markoff (2005) maintain that Korean people have been exploring the potential of digital media to make an extension of democracy through a series of social experiences, such as candlelight vigils.

“When there was an absence of proper communication media to share ideas, people could have thought that they were the only people who had complaints

about the government. However, it seems that they could get realised that others also had the same complaints with society or politics by sharing ideas through digital media such as SNSs and mobile messengers. I think the consent among them through digital communication could have led to active political expressions of them.” (Jeon, S. O., a present civil servant from the MCST and a former civil servant from the GIA, 29 September 2017)

It seems evident that Koreans have achieved considerable performance in terms of civic politics in the digital age. In this regard, Freedom House (14 November 2017⁷⁴) reported that Korea’s rate of Internet freedom slightly increased by an annual international survey. The candlelight vigils, which started from 29 October 2016 for President Park’s impeachment, seemed to affect the rating change. However, while the rate of Internet freedom improved and the ranking increased compared to the previous year, Korea is still categorised in the group of ‘partly free countries’, which remains the same in 2018. Considering this, it is doubtful whether the Korean society achieved the same level of democratic performance of civil society in influencing the political leaders and politicians.

“Internet freedom improved during the period of political mobilization that led up to the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye... Weekly rallies demanding her removal and the restoration of democratic principles were held across the country for months starting on October 29.... Korean citizens’ innovative and effective use of physical and digital resources to exercise their political rights (Tharoor 2017⁷⁵). On the other hand, investigations resulting from the scandal

⁷⁴ Freedom House. (2017). “Freedom on the Net”
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/south-korea>

⁷⁵ Tharoor, I. (2017). “South Korea just showed the world how to do democracy.” (*The Washington Post*, 10 May)

underlined the extent to which freedom of expression had been eroded since the conservative party came into power in 2008.” (Freedom House 2017⁷⁶)

7.4. The Korean governments’ attempts to control digital communications of the public

Despite the people’s efforts to keep their citizenship and develop democracy at the societal aspect, there have been some cases showing that the Korean government seems to have regulated the freedom of public expression. Although a mutual communication environment was possible due to the emergence of interactive digital platforms such as SNSs since the 2000s, digital communication between the government and the people tended to be mainly operated one-sidedly. In addition, the Korean governments have shown coercive attitudes by taking actions with censorship and regulation. However, excessive regulations without obtaining social justification could harm democratic society as well as impinge freedom of expression of the public which is a fundamental democratic value. In this vein, this section investigates the Korean government’s excessive regulation on the publics’ freedom of expression on digital platforms by giving details. In addition, it specifically analyses how the government’s actions compromised democracy in Korea.

7.4.1. Regulative tendencies of the Korean governments toward digital media

According to Trytko (2016: 12), anonymity on digital spaces, which helps secure the users’ privacy and freedom of speech, has been an essential element in the role of the digital technologies in a modern democracy. There has been a broad

⁷⁶ Freedom House. (2017). “Freedom on the Net”
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/south-korea>

agreement among scholars that digital communication with anonymity has a significant influence on the formation of democracy in the digital age (see, Papacharissi & Papacharissi 2010; Dahlberg 2011; Fuchs 2007; Mossberger et al. 2007; Trytko 2016). In this vein, considering the fact that Habermas points out the limitations of the bourgeois public sphere at the social class aspect (Dahlgren 2001: 34), the anonymity and universal access which are possible in digital spaces can provide the people with a more liberal and horizontal communication environment.

Regarding this, Nielsen (2014) argues that the emergence of digital networking tools that enable deliberation in digital spaces has led to favourable circumstances for public participation in public discourse (Trytko 2016: 12). However, ironically a variety of cybercrimes exploiting anonymity began to take place during the early 2000s when the use of the digital media increased, such as a series of suicide incidents due to malicious comments and personal information leakage from the portal sites. In this regard, the government during the Roh regime suggested a countermeasure plan of anonymity issue on the digital spaces by the minister of MIC, Chin Dae-je on 28 March 2003.

The government concretely carried out ‘the Internet Real-Name Registration System’ that requires confirmation of the identity of the users mandatorily when posting on a bulletin board of the governmental organisation. However, although it was intended to prevent black propaganda and cyberterrorism, there was also a serious matter with this issue that cannot be ignored. Furthermore, after the enforcement of the government action, many problems such as uncertainty about the scope of Internet media companies, infringement of individual human rights including freedom of anonymous expression and exposure of resident registration, and restriction of political participation by the public appeared in Korean society. It was also regarded that the

government's censorship may excessively violate the citizens' freedom of expression in the digital spaces.

In this context, Haggard and You (2015: 174) argue that the government decided to regulate the online media environment despite criticism by the public and many human right organisations in Korea. In the meantime, as the SNSs emerged, the 'Internet Real-Name Registration System' was no longer effective. Regarding this, the Constitutional Court found that the policy not only violates citizens' freedom of expression that has to be guaranteed by the Constitution but also was less effective in terms of public interest. In the end, based on the Constitution's judgment, it was unanimously judged that the 'Internet Real-Name Registration System' was unconstitutional on 23 August 2012, which meant that it was abolished five years after its introduction.

Meanwhile, while the previous progressive government under Roh's regime had tried to involve citizen participation in order to solve the social problems and obtain political support, the governmental institutions under Lee's regime seemed to show different attitudes from that. According to a journal paper written by Doucette and Koo (2014), the Lee government strengthened the conservative power and obstructed the work of liberal and progressive parties at a more central level. It also continued to stress anti-communist rhetoric and undermined democratisation by suppressing the publics' freedom of expression expressed voluntarily and freely as other conservative regimes did (ibid).

In particular, the Lee government's regulation of digital spaces appeared to become more severe in the mid-2000s when digital media, including SNSs, began to spread rapidly. The Lee Myung-bak government tried to use digital media to communicate with the people at the beginning of its term, ostensibly reflecting the

social trends of the widespread use of digital platforms in society. It seems that the Lee government considered that the public voices were unfavourable to government affairs. The government also regarded the rumours on the Internet as things threatening Lee's regime created by the opposing forces in order to weaken the government's legitimacy.

Although President Lee was inaugurated in late February 2008, the public debates on digital policy did not commence in earnest until August of the same year (Larson & Park 2014: 355). In particular, in the late 2000s, the Korean political system itself tended to go backward, regardless of digital development. It seemed that the Lee government concerned about the possibility that ordinary people had more opportunities to express their opinions and gather to act collectively through digital interactions. A series of candlelight vigils opposed the import of U.S. beef and the opposition to other policies of the new Lee administration, including his pro-Chaebol and pro-business stance, delaying the start of normal government operations. Through a series of events, the Lee administration recognised that netizens were difficult to control and manage and considered the digital space as a place that was already distorted and must be controlled.

Considering this, Lee (2012: 117) argues that public communication culture in Korea led to the government's desire to supervise the communicative networks. In fact, the government's desire appeared indirectly at first, by controlling online users' free speech rights with the application of more rigid copyright laws. Indeed, Lee J. H., a chairman of the Korea Internet-media Journalists Association [KIJA], stated in a conference in 2008 that "The Lee government and the ruling party, embarrassed by the power of the Internet media which are symbolised as 'Agora' on 'Daum' and candlelight vigil, regarded the digital spaces as a place occupied by anti-Lee Myung-

bak forces. Thus, there is a concern that the government is pursuing regulation and repression oriented policies.”

Regarding this, through an interview, Song, K. J (2017) also pointed out that since the government did not provide a proper space for communication to the public, or rather repressed their rights to express their voices, the citizen’s communication desires were expressed on the private portal site and the SNS channels, respectively.

“I think the function of communication had degenerated in the Lee government. There were many events that show freedom of expression was suppressed, such as mad cow disease, Minerva incident and Internet real-name system. Digital spaces that the government operated had become rooms for providing administrative services rather than communicating and sharing ideas. Literally, at that time, freedom of expression has been shrinking.” (Song, K. J., an academic in Korea, 27 September 2017)

In the Korean political context, the censorship and the state control over the media may have been taken for granted in the previous authoritarian regimes even though it is not fair in a democratic state. However, in the present society, the government’s control on digital communication among the people may not be generally accepted since it is considered as an abuse of authority as well as a violation of the fundamental human right, freedom of expression. Furthermore, controlling political expressions and the actions of the people for the reason of national stability could be regarded that the government controls the essential commodity of democracy. In this sense, while the development of digital technology was continued, overall the regulative tendency of the Korean regimes towards digital communication of the people seemed not to lead to the development of democracy in the society.

7.4.2. Korean conservative government's censorship on the digital spaces

Information shared through digital media without formal confirmation procedures can be freely circulated at any time and situation. However, if the information on digital spaces without a clear source is quantitatively dominant, it can affect the way that people's opinions are formed. Moreover, the public opinion that was shaped on digital communication platforms is likely to be used politically even though it is not a political issue. It can be considered that as the speed of the spread of information is extremely fast due to the digital networking system, the pace of politicising non-political issues is also exceedingly fast. These phenomena shown in the digital society are placed at the centre diversity and social division, which has something to do with democracy.

In this regard, there are two notable political and social issues that occurred in around 2010 during the Lee government: the 'Minerva' and 'Cheonan' shipbreaking incidents. Firstly, one of the issues worth paying attention to in terms of the government's power abuse on digital space as a public sphere was the so-called 'Minerva' incident. An amateur expert with the nickname of Minerva (autonym: Park Dae-seong) on the Internet attracted netizens' attention by writing articles criticizing the government's economic policy on the 'Agora' bulletin board on Daum, which is one of the biggest portal sites in Korea. Minerva's economic forecasts showed a high hit rate and received attention from foreign media (The Guardian, 22 January 2009⁷⁷; The Irish Times, 13 August 2009⁷⁸) as well as domestic netizens.

⁷⁷ Bowcott, O. (2009). "South Korean blogger faces trial for pessimistic financial forecasts" <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jan/22/south-korean-blogger-minerva-prosecution>

⁷⁸ Coonan, C. (2009). "Battle for S Korean democracy pits Bulldozer against Minerva" <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/battle-for-s-korean-democracy-pits-bulldozer-against-minerva-1.1234119>

However, as the level of criticism about the government's economic policy has heightened and the netizens' interest and suspicion about Minerva's identity increased, the government began to regard it as a dangerous threat. In the end, the Seoul Central Prosecutor's Office arrested the person with the nickname 'Minerva' allegedly for leaking false information on the digital space for the purpose of harming the public interest by charging him with violation of the Telecommunications Basic Law. The arrest of Minerva is regarded as a representative event causing controversy over freedom of expression and privacy by public power. While this incident was closed on 20 April 2009 as Minerva was acquitted, it is considered that the Minerva incident affected how the government applied regulatory policies to Internet citizens until the end of the regime. Furthermore, it also needs to note that there was a big gap in opinions about this issue between the ruling party, the conservative one and the opposition, the progressive one.

Regarding this, the Conservative Party officially announced: "We will arrange alternative legislation as soon as possible because a serious disruption has occurred due to the dissemination of false fact through the Internet." Meanwhile, the Democratic Party which is an opposition force, made an announcement putting an emphasis on the protection of freedom of expression by saying, "We are welcome the rational decision of the Constitution that recognised the fundamental right of freedom of expression" (Money Today, 28 December 2010⁷⁹).

Secondly, there was another attempt by the government to control the unconfirmed information that people shared in digital spaces. On 26 March 2010, the 'Cheonan' shipbreaking occurred, where a Korean Navy ship called 'Cheonan,' that was carrying soldiers, sank into the sea near Baegryeong Island. After this big security

⁷⁹ Yang, Y. K. (2010). "Minerva penalty law, unconstitutional. The opposition party 'welcome', the ruling party 'alternative legislation'" (*in Korean*)
<http://news.mt.co.kr/mtview.php?no=2010122817460703848&type=1>

issue related to North Korea took place, alleged conspiracy and suspicion claims began to appear on the Internet regardless of the truth. When some made false claims on the Internet, others supported them, which resulted in making the situation twisted and the false information multiplied. The unconfirmed information was more easily retrieved and exchanged on the Internet portals and SNSs because of its search and information storage function. This phenomenon can be explained with the assumption that suspicion of the people about the explanation that the government officially announced about the incident spread even more on the Internet.

“In an era of active democracy in Korea, the fast-developing Internet environment that everyone can easily use the Internet is accompanied by unique government regulations and crackdown. Government censorship stemming from political tensions with North Korea and traditional social values has curbed Korean Internet users. Various laws restrict many aspects of digital activities by the public. Observers say the crackdown had become more severe when conservative party seized power.” (Freedom House, December 2014⁸⁰)

The rumours the police controlled ‘Cheonan’ at that time were mainly about ‘US military collision’, ‘the government’s intentional action to favour local election’ and ‘South Korea’s pre-emptive strike to North Korea’. As a result, six months after the shooting of the ‘Cheonan’ ship (from March to September 2010), requests for 1,324 cases of deletion of false information on the Internet proceeded. 77 illegal actors were investigated, and many of them had to be prosecuted (Wolgan Chosun, November

⁸⁰ Freedom House. (2014). Freedom on the Net
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2014/south-korea>

2017⁸¹). In the end, the ‘Cheonan’ shipbreaking incident, which was regarded as an accident at first, seems to have acted as an important political issue preceding the local election on 2 June. Regarding this, it seems obvious that the Korean conservative regime during the digital age neither properly prepared for nor coped with the public’s political and social influence that was expanded through the digital communication system. Moreover, the infringement of the government on freedom of expression of the people in the late 2000s is regarded to undermine democracy in society seriously.

7.4.3. Korean conservative government’s manipulation of public opinions on digital spaces

Since Korea entered the digital society, the Korean government seemed to have gone through the digital media transition period. In the period of the prevalent digital use in society, it seems that the government realised that it needed a social device to control the digital world. Considering the characteristics of digital media as public property, the government enacted laws to regulate digital communications among people. However, the government’s regulation on the digital space seemed to be reinforced or distorted, as the conflicts with the public got worse. In this regard, the Korean government in the early 2000s made attempts to manipulate public opinion in the digital spaces.

There are a couple of social issues in terms of the government's manipulation of digital information to be noted: ‘digital platforms neutralisation’ and ‘NIS’s public opinion manipulation scandal’. Since the early 2000s in some countries such as the U.S. and European countries, the concept of ‘network neutrality’ has been socially discussed.

⁸¹ Kim, T. W. (2017). “Internet President ‘Roh Moo-hyun, Moon Jae-in and the tragedy of comments’ democracy” (*in Korean*)
<http://pub.chosun.com/client/news/viw.asp?cate=C01&mcate=M1001&nNewsNumb=20171126740&nidx=26741>

A little later than then, the concept of ‘neutrality’ in terms of digital media has been discussed in earnest in Korea. This can be interpreted as meaning that digital platforms should be neutral even if a specific opinion is dominant on the platforms.

However, in this regard, some experts have argued that the government set policies and related regulatory legislation that ignored the characteristics of the digital platforms by regarding the online portals as journalism in Korea. According to Ryu, an expert in technology management, “It is difficult to define the platform neutrality because it does not exist absolute neutrality on the Internet platform originally. The results shown on the Internet are based on mechanical algorithms, but since the coding of algorithms depends on a person, it is inevitable that subjective judgment would be reflected in the end” (The Korean Economic Daily, 16 July 2017⁸²). Regarding this, Lee, W. T., an interviewee who is one of the Korean experts in the ICTs field, agreed with this opinion by mentioning that even if there is a specific dominant opinion, it cannot be forcibly reduced. According to him, there is nothing totally objective in the digital spaces, and it is also dangerous to control algorithms because regulations should not be beyond the level of manipulation.

“I was invited to join a task force team to stop the online rumours in the Lee administration. The members of the TFT discussed how to control the rumours that hinder the legitimacy of the government. However, many experts in the TFT at the time argued that it should be left on self-purification of the Internet and the third independent regulatory organisations. I also think it seems that the flow of the previous government’s attempt to manipulate public opinions on the Internet has affected the National Intelligence Service [NIS] and other national

⁸² Ryoo, M. H. (2017). “For whom is the discussion ‘Platform Neutrality’” (in Korean) <http://news.hankyung.com/article/2017071627751>

organisations' public opinion manipulation which influenced the birth of the Park Geun-hye government." (Lee, W. T., a senior researcher from the KISDI, 22 September 2017)

In the meantime, during the 18th presidential election campaign, an enormous political scandal in terms of the government-led manipulation of public opinion on digital platforms, which is the so-called 'manipulation of public opinion by the National Intelligence Service [NIS]', became a big issue. NIS under the Lee regime manipulated the public opinion on digital platforms, including the main portal sites that already replaced the traditional media. More specifically, the members of NIS posted on the Internet in accordance with orders from the superior officer. It was large-scale, as the NIS staff's postings have been identified in more than 15 sites.

The posts on the Internet sites mainly consisted of favourable opinions of a candidate for the ruling party, Park Geun-hye, and statements to defame the opposition candidate, Moon Jae-in. "According to South Korea's Yonhap news agency, the report said that days before the 2012 election, NIS officials who are usually engaged in psychological warfare against North Korea posted messages critical of Moon on social networking and news sites" (The Guardian, 4 August 2017⁸³). Consequently, President Park Geun-hye after the Lee Myung-bak administration, which is both conservative regimes, defeated the progressive presidential candidate Moon Jae-in by a margin of 3.5 per cent points, or roughly one million votes (The New York Times, 30 August 2017⁸⁴).

This political scandal is regarded as a case where they tried to use the public opinion on the digital platforms for political reasons to keep the conservative regime.

⁸³ McCurry, J. (2017). "South Korea spy agency admits trying to rig 2012 presidential election" <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/04/south-koreas-spy-agency-admits-trying-rig-election-national-intelligence-service-2012>

⁸⁴ Choe, S. H. (2017). "Former south Korean spy chief sentenced for trying to sway election" (*in Korean*) <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/30/world/asia/south-korea-spy-chief-sentenced.html>

Reflecting on the past Korean politics, regime maintenance was a pivotal political philosophy as well as a kind of routine in the Korean political system, as in other democratic states. It may be a reasonable doubt that there is more possibility for the successive regime to commit political retaliation, for the reason of liquidation of the previous regime's various corruptions, if the following regime is from the opposite political power. In this context, it could be considered that the conservative political forces tried to manipulate public opinion through digital media to avoid transferring the regime to the opposition political forces.

Turning to the Moon Jae-in government, who became the next president in Korea, the prosecution launched an investigation into the NIS scandal. Through this investigation, it has been revealed that Won Sei-hoon, the head of NIS at that time, directed the employees to engage in political activities through the NIS internal intranet for a few years. It was also suspected that there was a connection between the NIS and police in order to conceal this incident. Regarding this, one of the domestic presses released news headlining, "The systemic and planned intervention of the presidential election was carried out by consecutively conspiring of the NIS" (Hankook Ilbo, 20 April 2018⁸⁵). In the end, the chairperson Won was convicted with a four-year sentence, after receiving a declaration of suspension of execution at the first trial and three-year sentence at the trial on appeal. This political scandal is regarded as the worst public opinion manipulation and illegal election ever committed by NIS, military, the police, and the administration.

"Won Sei-hoon, who led the National Intelligence Service [NIS] from 2009 to 2013, was sentenced to three years in prison in February for his role in a secret

⁸⁵ Son, H. S. & Kim, J. J. (2018). "Recognition of the 18th presidential election fraud. Justification of President Park is shaking" (in Korean)
<http://www.hankookilbo.com/v/33ffccf8825f4a25b3430367462c12ae>

online drive by agents alleged to have posted 274,800 slanderous messages about Ms Park's opponents.” (Financial Times, 16 July 2015⁸⁶)

Public opinion on digital platforms played a considerably significant role in Korean politics. In this vein, the Korean government in the age of digital media diversification around the early 2000s seem to recognise the overall enormous impacts of the digital networking mechanism on politics as well as society. However, the government tried to control digital spaces by mobilising professionals and illegally manipulated public opinions on digital spaces for the sake of its own private profit. The government has promoted policies and committed a political violation against democracy, rather than coping with the social changes appropriately. Given that, it can be said that these cases showed the undemocratic political situation in Korean society, which is seemingly evaluated as one of the developed democratic countries.

“Korean society has suffered a social loss due to the government’s undue media interventions. There have been many problems due to the government’s abuse of power in relation to the intervention of public opinion. In particular, the National Intelligence Service [NIS]’s public opinion manipulation scandal in 2012 can be a recent example, which demonstrates the current status of democracy in Korean society.” (Woo, Y. S., a previous civil servant and a present academic in Korea, 15 September 2017)

“Democracy is not a concept of attainment, but a concept developing continuously. The last conservative regimes have repeatedly tried to distort and manipulate information and facts. In fact, the NIS tried to manipulate information on the Internet, but I think it was a little leery in the vast digital

⁸⁶Song, J. A. (2015). “South Korea orders retrial of former spy chief Won Sei-hoon” (*in Korean*) <https://www.ft.com/content/ad223bca-2b95-11e5-8613-e7aedbb7bdb7>

communication environment.” (Jeon, S. O., a senior civil servant from the MCST and a former civil servant from the GIA, 29 September 2017)

7.4.4. Korean government’s difficulties in coping with social crisis in the digital age

Turning to the 2010s, Koreans have indeed more widely used digital devices and software platforms in their usual lives to obtain and share information. In particular, during that period, the use of SNSs, which were new types of digital communication platforms, began to expand in Korean society. Regarding this, Boyd and Ellison (2007) stated that SNSs had been regarded as web-based services that allow individuals to build knowledge and disseminate information within a bounded system. However, the digital communication environment, which allows many-to-many or an individualised communication environment, occasionally acted as a threat to the government who was located in the position to have to control the public opinion on digital spaces.

In this regard, a couple of notable national incidents indirectly related to public safety have taken place continuously during the SNS era: the ‘Sewol’ ferry sink and the ‘MERS’ epidemic outbreak. Firstly, one of the enormously destructive issues was the ‘Sewol’ ferry sink incident in April 2014: a ferry carrying 476 passengers including 315 high school students sank when it was travelling from Incheon to Jeju Island, resulting in the death of more than 300 passengers. The government tried to turn the accusation of the people to a subordinate agency in relation to the incident, and one of the decisions made by the Park Geun-hye government was to disband the Korean Maritime Police (Cheong Wa Dae 2014). However, this was not considered as an appropriate solution by the citizens to clear these fundamental problems.

Regarding this unprecedented tragic accident, the public blamed the Park government due to the government's lax attitude and sluggish response to the national disaster. The government's improper and irresponsible response raised the public's distrust. Moreover, through this incident, the chronic social problems of Korean society were revealed. The causes of this tragic disaster link to numerous political and social problems such as inadequately enforced safety regulations, absence of crisis response structural strategies, the capture of government officers by particular stakeholders, and typical corruption such as bribery and coalescence between private and public corporations (The Board of Audit & Inspection 2014; Lee & Im 2014: 4-5; Rho 2015: 4-5; Lim et al. 2016: 147). Although there were fundamental corruption problems, all the concerned political stakeholders treated the 'Sewol' ferry sink incident as an accident like a natural disaster through the traditional media. This is because the government tried to minimise this issue and shift all the blame from the people to other issues.

Meanwhile, in this national tragedy, it needs to be noted that most of the passengers on the ferry left electronic evidence by using smartphones. According to Larson (2017: 6), in terms of the 'Sewol' ferry sink incident, a lot of evidence such as text messages and phone call records to their family, and video clips recording the urgent situation at that moment could have been secured as evidence. In this situation, the government neither prevented emerging spontaneous evidence from the victims nor controlled the negative public opinions that were widespread through digital spaces. Furthermore, as the government hid the President's actions to cope with this tragic incident during the seven hours after the ferry sank, the people's condemnation of the incompetence of the government became severe. Consequently, the 'Sewol' ferry sink

incident gave an enormous shock to the whole society in many ways, and furthermore, it became a big political issue.

Even after the incident, many people participated in digital collective actions to commemorate the victims by changing their personal media profile picture on platforms such as SNSs and Kakao Talk, which is the most popular mobile instant messenger in Korea, to a yellow ribbon. Through the personal platforms, the people shared the expression of mourning, which formed a sort of sharing culture in a way that they shared daily lives or political participation. The government could not prevent these kinds of social phenomena that have resulted from the ordinary people's voluntary participation through digital media as the previous authoritarian military regimes did.

After the Sewol ferry sink incident, the 'MERS (the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)' outbreak was another big social issue related to public safety. It was the largest outbreak outside⁸⁷ the Middle East with 186 confirmed cases and 36 fatal cases, while a total of 16,693 quarantined to prevent the spread of the virus, reported on 20 May 2015. Regarding this, the government, as well as traditional media, paid attention to this social issue and delivered a lot of information about this epidemic that Koreans had never suffered from in the past. However, the government's initial misperception about sources of infection and its poor actions in understanding and controlling the outbreaks adversely affected the uneasy social atmosphere. The government neither coped adequately with the dissemination of information among the people through digital platforms nor timely provided correct information to the public.

While the government coped with these national disasters with a lukewarm measure, the people themselves intensified social unrest by sharing unidentified information on the Internet. In fact, the Ministry of Health and Welfare [MOHW] did

⁸⁷ BBC. (2015). "Mers outbreak: Hong Kong warns against S Korea travel." (June) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-33059049>

not disclose the relevant information, such as the names of medical institutions that were hospitalising the ‘MERS’ patient, to people at the beginning (The Korea Herald, 2 June 2015⁸⁸). This attitude of the government made the public share even unconfirmed information among themselves on digital platforms regardless of the mass media deliveries. However, their unconfirmed information exchanges rather deepened the concerns about the epidemic in society. In this regard, Kim et al. (2016: 1416) point out that the public trusts in local government to control the ‘MERS’ outbreak was much lower, compared to that seen in Hong Kong during the 2009 epidemic.

“Park’s government - already struggling with public trust in the wake of the Sewol ferry disaster last year that killed more than 300 people - has been widely criticized for trying to keep key details from the public, especially by declining to name the hospitals where infected patients were treated.” (The Washington Post, 8 June 2015⁸⁹)

Considering these recent issues in Korea, it can be noticed that Koreans have used digital media as a means of sharing problems or events, discussing them and exploring how to find solutions. In this vein, Yoo et al. (2016) argue that the proliferation of SNSs has changed the way people access information, such that they do not have to depend on the government or traditional news media as their key information source. It seems obvious that digital platforms, including SNSs, are acting as a useful tool through which to communicate with and learn from others about the current social issues in Korea. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the public’s

⁸⁸ Shin, J. H. (2015). “Korea mulling disclosure of MERS-affected hospitals”
<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150602001071>

⁸⁹ Seo, Y. J. & Fifield, A. (2015). “South Koreans blame government in spiralling MERS outbreak”
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/south-koreans-blame-government-in-spiraling-mers-outbreak/2015/06/08/716531e0-0de1-11e5-a0fe-dccfea4653ee_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4b1f65f46e15

collectively operated active digital interactions are now powerful enough to pressure the government.

Given these issues in Korean society, Freedom House (2018)⁹⁰ reports, “Koreans have embraced digital technology for civic engagement and political mobilisation.” However, it seems that as unexpected social issues have been rising continuously, the free communication of the people through digital media has come to the Korean government as a big crisis. In other words, the government, which did not have adequate preparation for the crisis in the digital era, seems to have failed in the crisis management. In this context, it seems obvious that the public's voices through new ways in the digital age are considered as a challenge to the Korean government.

7.5. The function of political communications through digital media in shaping Korean democracy

While the political activities of Koreans became notable and the scale is considerably enlarged in the digital age, various social issues in relation to digital communication affecting democracy in Korean society appeared in the process of democratisation during the last twenty-five years. Although the previous governments had tended to regulate digital communications among the people intensively, digital communication in Korean society has been continuously evolving at the aspects of both the government and civil society by experiencing various events. Given that, this section analyses the modern citizenships of Koreans enhanced through digital communications, which affected the reformation of the relationship between the government and the public in terms of democracy. Furthermore, it specifically discusses democratic challenges in terms of that which Korea as a digital society faces.

⁹⁰ Freedom House. (2018). Freedom on the Net 2018.
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/south-korea>

7.5.1. Enhanced political power of Koreans in the digital age

Although Korea is a country that is built based on the democratic ideology, an authoritarian tendency has still been dominant in Korean political system. In this vein, there have been practical problems in the Korean political system in terms of the exclusion of the opinions of the public in the top-down decision-making. Nevertheless, many observers argue that ordinary people's power in politics has been significantly enhanced in the recent Korean digital mediated society compared to the authoritarian era. In this regard, Lee (2004b) argues, "Traditional Korean values such as respect for authority and hierarchy are rapidly giving way as increased value is placed on individual freedoms and equality."

Digital media can be regarded as an effective means of the people at the bottom to directly deliver their needs and opinions to the top without going through unnecessary steps. The direct communication nature of digital media seems to expand Koreans' participation in politics in various ways. In this vein, the usual digital communication of the people deeply rooted in everyday life naturally led to the public's increased attention and sharing of opinions on diverse social and political issues. More importantly, digital communication among the public tends to affect their political behaviours. "The citizen as the subject of power comes into being through acts of making rights claims" (Isin & Ruppert 2015: 44). Regarding this, one of the civil servants in Korea argues that Koreans have obtained much more influential authority to exert their rights as citizens in the current digital age, compared to the past.

"At the previous authoritarian regime, the government actively intercepted information through media control. Nevertheless, the students of the colleges and ordinary people could be convinced through watching the waves of the huge

demonstrations on the streets and reading hand-written posters that the other people had the same thoughts. The same situation cannot take place in the present society because everyone can deliver information by using his or her own digital media. Digital media are playing a considerable role in spreading people's thoughts. In particular, thanks to SNSs, people can share them in real-time. The spread of information through digital media has contributed to the formation of a sense of unity of participation of the people.” (Yang, S. O., a civil servant from Seoul City Hall, 20 September 2017)

Digital media communication has affected the way of communicating between the political actors and the people in various ways. In particular, due to the digital platforms' nature of enabling direct, instant interaction today, communication between the government and the people occurs more frequently in various ways. At present, almost all Koreans use digital networking platforms, and politicians are not exclusion. The digital media's political uses not only by ordinary people but also by politicians are already prevalent. The politicians utilise their own SNS channels to promote themselves and their political affairs as they recognise the digital communication channels are effective tools for political promotions (Stoker 2006). In this situation, active communications between political actors and the public in Korea are taking place.

The relationship between the politicians and the people in Korea, which is relatively enhanced compared to the mass media era, seemed to be revealed in official parliamentary hearings regarding the scandal of President Park Geun-hye in December 2016. In this digitally embedded society, during the parliamentary hearings, citizens watching through broadcasting and online actively delivered evidence, that could prove whether the related people's testimony was true or not, to the members of the National Assembly who were representatives, to ask them instead of the public through

smartphones in real-time. This phenomenon was quite unfamiliar but impressive because it was not the usual situation in Korean politics until that time. It seemed like netizen power during the 2000s revived with a mobile presence.

Given the recent political and social phenomena such as the public's collective actions in terms of the impeachment of President Park that occurred in 2016, it seems evident that the argument that the empowerment of the citizens became even stronger is more persuasive. By experiencing the various social issues, citizens in Korea secured more chances to exert their power as citizens. Furthermore, it is regarded that they have enormously expanded political participation through digital communication and have diversified the level of political activities through digital platforms. In this sense, it can be regarded that Koreans achieved what they want from the utmost political power by actively acting as citizens with sovereignty by using digital communications.

To sum up, digital communication contributed to giving the Koreans more opportunities to communicate, shape the public sphere, and take political actions to impact reality. In particular, digital communication is significantly meaningful in terms of democracy in that citizens' political participation through cyberspaces broke the traditional meaning of social order and hierarchy in society. It seems to affect the relationship between the government and the public. In this context, it can be said that digital communication impacts the relationship between political leaders and the public. The relationship is more horizontal and substantial to Korean democratisation. Consequently, in the balance of power between the government and the citizens in civil society in the digital age, it seems that Korean society and its democracy kept being transformed.

7.5.2. Challenges in Korean democracy in the digital age

According to the analyses in the preceding sections, it can be regarded that the Korean governments have contributed to providing equal information access to people through digital technology significantly, and it is a contribution to democratic society at the aspect of equality. However, at the same time, it is also identified that although the public kept trying to exert their citizenships by simply sharing political opinions to committing collective political actions including candlelight vigils, the former conservative governments rather tended to repress their participation in the political sphere. While the digital citizenship of the public has expanded, there has also been continuous regulation by the government of digital communication, including the collective actions by civil society. Regarding this, Isin and Ruppert (2015: 22) claim, “The birth of the citizen as a subject of power does still not mean the disappearance of the subject as a subject to the power.”

It is regarded that undemocratic digital communication between the government and the people, or among the public themselves inevitably involves a number of social problems. Regarding this, Lee (2004b) argues, “Paradoxically, all this progress appears to have created a society more fragmented than ever before, with increased social conflict and instability.” In this context, the government’s excessive involvement in digital communications can lead to serious democracy damage. More specifically, the excessive regulation of the government can directly undermine democratic values such as violation of the publics’ right to express their own voices and invasion of privacy.

It can be said that Korean society still faces challenges in relation to democratic values, such as the government’s regulation on the publics’ freedom of expression and its abuse of political power on digital platforms. It can be considered that the top political power’s excessive regulation on not only virtual spaces but also the civil

movements in real society seems to have significantly undermined democracy in Korean society. Furthermore, it can be said that the Korean governments' attitudes dealing with the publics' voices are still aligned on past practices. Considering the undemocratic political issues (*Figure 19*) that have been taking place in Korea, it seems a persuasive argument that Korean digital society has not been always operated in a democratic sense.

Figure 19. The timeline of the main social and political issues in Korea

Year	Main Social Issues in Korea (Specific starting point)
2002	2002 Korean and Japan World Cup Street Cheering , The First Collective Demonstration (Jun)
	The birth of Internet President Roh Moo-Hyun (Dec), Starting fandom phenomenon in politics (Rosamo)
2004	<u>Candlelight vigils</u> against impeachment of President Roh
2008	<u>Candlelight vigils</u> against import of U.S. beef (Mad cow disease)
2009	Regulation on dissemination of false facts on digital spaces: Minerva incident (Jan)
2010	Controlling fake information on the Internet: ' Cheonan ' Shipbreaking incident (Mar) & Digital Platform Neutrality
2013	National Intelligence Service [NIS]'s public opinion manipulation
2014	' Sewol ' ferry sink, 304 passengers death (16 Apr)
2015	Breaking ' MERS ' Epidemic (May)
	Death of a farmer (Baek, Nam-Ki) , participating a public mass rally by the police's water cannon (14 Nov)
2016	Scandal of President Park, <u>Candlelight vigils</u> requiring impeachment of President Park (Oct)
2017	Various demonstrations based on different political ideologies, conservatism and progressivism
2018	Severe social polarisation and social conflicts

Source: Author

Given these series of issues, it is considered that Korean society still needs to balance the forces between the citizens' diverse participation and the government's regulation in terms of digital communication to enhance overall democracy. Nevertheless, Bae and Kim (2013: 11) argue that Korean civic society has made efforts in making Korea's democracy deeper and more substantive in the digital age. In particular, digital interactions among ordinary people in Korea can be regarded as an important factor in shaping democracy in the present era.

The new digital communications by citizens in civil society groups have led to the emergence and reinforcement of new forms of public participation (Feenstra & Casero-Ripollés 2014: 2448). In particular, despite the government's various attempts to control digital communication in civil society, Koreans have achieved considerable social accomplishments such as the candlelight demonstrations by using digital communications. In the process of democratisation in the digital age, Koreans' political participation is regarded to be expanded through digital communications. In this vein, it can be considered that digital communications contribute to shaping and strengthening Korean direct, participatory democracy.

Let us note that participatory democracy has been enhanced during the progressive regimes in Korean history. Digital communications between the government and citizens have had a different democratic status, depending on different political conservative and progressive ideologies, respectively. Compared to when the conservative regimes took power, it seems that the progressive regimes tried to expand political participation by using digital media and regulated digital spaces relatively less. Considering this, it seems more persuasive the assumption that digital media have been mainly used as tools for enhancing direct, participatory democracy in Korean society.

However, it is still important to be considered that the democratic function of digital media communication cannot be adequately operated if political practice and routine still remain undemocratic. Regarding this, Im (2000) perceptively argues, "All the tasks of democratic consolidation depend on the strategic interactions among relevant political actors involved." Given that, in the process of societal transformation, it can be considered that considering the various social and political issues that took place, Korea still has many things to consider in terms of the development of democracy.

7.6. Conclusion

Digital spaces in contemporary Korea are regarded as critical political and social arenas, which have the potential to affect democracy in real society. The implications of digital communication for democracy are not significant only as a new communication tool (Dahlgren 2001: 44), but also in that it arises in an overall context of reshaping democracy in Korea. In this chapter, it was identified that power relations between political leaders and followers are rearranged at a deeper level through various digital activities. The balance of power between the government and the public in Korean society in the digital age changed by different regimes whose digital media uses were distinguished by the regimes based on the different political ideologies. In this context, it was recognised that during the last couple of decades, Korea, as a digital society, has experienced considerable democratic accomplishments, as well as some democratic retreats during the same period.

Despite undemocratic sanctions at the government level, Koreans actively participated in political participation and collective political actions through digital media. It is evident that Korean society has achieved outstanding performance in the aspect of expanding public participation through digital communications, which enhanced citizens' power in Korean politics. Therefore, it can be concluded that the digital mediated communications in Korean civil society tends to reinforce direct, participatory democracy, rather than representative democracy.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and implications

8.1. Research overview

This chapter presents a summary of the study. To begin with, it will discuss the main research findings of this thesis and the academic contribution it makes in the light of the aims of the thesis, as identified in Chapter 1. Then, it discusses the limitations of this thesis and makes suggestions for future study. Lastly, it summarises conclusions of the thesis.

The current thesis aimed to figure out *“How has digital communication influenced democracy in democratic societies?”* and *“What kind of democracy does the new digital communication promote and support?”* To do this, the author conducted a case study specifically focusing on Korea, which is one of the advanced digital societies as well as a democratic society in Asia. To achieve the research objectives, it examined digital communication in Korean society in the political context during the last twenty-five years and how democracy in Korea has been changed resulted from the development of digital communications.

Note that chapter 1 addressed the research background and overview of the study. When it comes to research design, this thesis set up research questions which were divided into two different steps: (1) Analysis of historical contexts of Korea’s digital communication infrastructure development in the political evolution process, and then (2) Analysis of changes of political communications at the government level as well as at the societal level during the recent twenty-five-years of Korea’s democratisation and digitalisation process. The specific research questions that were set up are given below.

R1. How has Korea's digital communication changed over the last twenty-five years?

- *What has been the politics of the Korean government's massive investment in digital communication?*
- *What factors have affected Korea to become a digital powerhouse?*

R2. How has digital communication in Korea affected Korean democracy since 1993? Overall, what kind of democracy has it promoted and supported?

- *R2-1. How has governmental digital communication affected democracy in Korea?*
 - ✓ *How has the Korean governments' digital communication changed in the processes of the Korean political democratisation?*
 - ✓ *What has been the relationship between the development of digital communication and the process of democratisation of the successive Korean regimes?*
 - ✓ *How has the Korean governments' digital communication related to landmark political events?*
- *R2-2. How has digital communication at the societal level affected democracy in Korea?*
 - ✓ *How has the digital communication of Koreans transformed their political participation?*
 - ✓ *How has the digital communication of Koreans changed the political power relationship between the government and Koreans?*
 - ✓ *How has the digital communication of Koreans related to landmark political events?*

Chapter 2 explained the research process and methodologies that applied to this study. It includes justification of the case study and of the selection of the case by explaining the theoretical gap and the need for research. Investigation procedures were divided into two different stages: (1) preliminary investigation and (2) fieldwork. For

the preliminary investigation, mainly documentary analysis and web analysis were conducted. Then, based on the data from the preliminary investigations, in-depth interviews were implemented both with past and present civil servants in Ministries of Korea and local government in Korea and with experts who have professional knowledge about the thesis topic.

The study aimed to identify the political implications of digital communication in present democratic society. In order to find out answers to the research questions, firstly, the study had to pay attention to theoretical discourse on democracy and political communications at governmental and civil societal levels in the digital age. Thus, chapter 3, by reviewing existing literature, reviewed theoretical approaches to changes of political communications at governmental and public aspects in the digital age and the relationship between public participation and democracy. In these theoretical discussions, the author revisited concepts of democracies such as direct democracy, participatory democracy and representative democracy, and specific democratic values, such as equality, freedom of expression and public participation. This was to provide theoretical criteria to this thesis in order to help to explain how Korea's democracy has evolved in the process of digital communication development.

The academic views on the democratic implications of digital political communication have varied. While some believe that digital communication has the potential to enhance democracy (see, Kraut et al. 2002; Katz & Rice 2002; Malina 2005; Holmes 2005; Tedesco 2004; Velázquez 2008; Pasek et al. 2009; Anduiza et al. 2012; Stieglitz & Linh 2013; Isin & Ruppert 2015), others argue that its impact on democracy and even politics is limited (see, Elshtain 1995; Fishkin 1995; Putnam 1995; Cappella & Jamieson 1997; Hague & Loader 1999; Jennings & Zeitner 2003; Clift:

2004; Stoker 2006; Lee 2006a; Lee 2006b; Hindman 2008; Lovink 2011; Houston 2016).

In the contrasting ideas of the impacts of digital technology on democracy, Barber (2001) particularly argues that different concepts of democracies can be strengthened or weakened by digital technologies and their operation by societies in the digital age. In particular, Gagnon and Chou (2018: 10) maintain that a high value of democracy is on the extended public participation, and digital technology can positively affect democracy by helping the development of public spaces where there is open discussion among the people. In this vein, Barber (2001) claims, “While digital technology enhanced both direct and participatory democracy, it weakened representative democracy.” Given this idea, this study scrutinised the relationships between digital communications and democracy through the Korean case by analysing the relationship between theoretical arguments and substantive findings.

8.2. Key findings

It is fundamentally difficult to explain the contemporary political communication phenomena because they vary depending on numerous factors such as local condition, specific culture, and the economic and political situation. In particular, according to Lyu (2006: 272), ICT reform efforts of diverse countries are different in nature and can show diverse pathways since each country has a varying cultural and historical background. Furthermore, compared to what we consider political communication in the past, the present one through diverse digital communication platforms can be much more complex to define or discuss.

For these reasons, the author conducted a case study prior to empirical analysis to set the foundation of logic and gain theoretical knowledge. In this regard, Chapter 4

focused on Korea's political, economic, cultural specificities in terms of the digital developmental process to help readers to understand overall this Korean case study. In this chapter, diverse aspects of Korean contexts were investigated in terms of the research topic, such as historical, cultural, economic, and political features. According to the examinations of the Korean contextual background, the multi-dwelling environment, the relatively small size of the land and high population density were used as beneficial factors in establishing digital networking infrastructure in Korea.

The Korean society had some specific cultural features that help to explain the rapid transition to an advanced digital society and settlement of its own digital culture: high literacy rate of Koreans, a strong attachment to education, and a 'hasty culture'. In particular, it was generally regarded that Korean political culture is not compatible with democratic consolidation because of the Confucian legacy. However, the hierarchical social system based on Confucian ideology, which used to hamper Korean democratic enhancement, is rather considered to influence in establishing ICTs development under the Korean government's strong leadership. The government organisation systems based on the hierarchical social system seem to have considerably influenced the rapid decision-making process in terms of the establishment of the Korean digital society, and eventually led to the government-led remarkable digital development. Consequently, it can be said that these national specificities are regarded to have affected the rapid establishment of Korean digital society.

In the meantime, Korea's economy has a strong connection with Korean politics and is highly involved in the development of Korean digital nations. The symbiotic relationship between political authorities and economic forces has played an imperative role in establishing digital infrastructure and boosting digital industries in Korea. In particular, the symbiotic relationship between the government and large conglomerates

in Korea played an important role in the process of digital development in Korea. Through this process, not only the existing Chaebols extended their market dominance into other IT sectors, but also e-Chaebols, which are a new type of Chaebol, emerged in Korea (Chang 2003). The strong symbiotic relationship between the government and the economic power played a significant role in establishing a digital society in Korea.

After the investigation of Korea's diverse factors that influenced digital development, the author focused on exploring the digital developmental process of Korea and finding out the main reasons for the Korean government's decision to develop ICTs. Chapter 5 was to find answers to the research question 1, ***“How has Korea's digital communication changed over the last twenty-five years?”*** According to the investigations, the main reasons that affected the Korean government's intensive investment in ICTs development at the early stage were: (1) the global digital trend and (2) the economic situation. From the early 1990s, informatisation and digitalisation were widespread over the developed countries, and at that time, Korea based on an export-driven economy needed to find a solution to survive in the global economy.

Korea had to follow the global trends to make a breakthrough to overcome economic plight, and in this vein, the Korean government strategically focused on knowledge-based economic growth. In particular, during the IMF financial crisis in 1997, the government significantly invested in the ICTs infrastructure establishment, considering that as the only solution to recover from the economic crisis. Furthermore, the Korean government decided to reconstruct the economic strategies by emphasising 'knowledge-intensive, high-tech areas based on the wealthy human capital (Lee 2003: 8)'. The previous civilian governments in the 1990s seemed to mostly focus on digital government use for national benefits such as economic vitalisation and administrative efficiency rather than considering the democratic impacts of digital technologies.

Under the strategical and concrete scheme and purposes, by having an appropriate infrastructure for ICTs development and sustainability, Korea could establish a world-class transparent and efficient online presence. More specifically, each Korean government since 1993 has set up concrete short-term and long-term plans fitting the ICTs developmental phases. It can be segmentalised that the time period from 1993 to 2002 was the stage of establishment of digital infrastructure and from 2003 to 2018 as the stage of active use of digital media as political tools. However, the concept of efficiency has been pursued consistently by all the governments when it set the digital communication strategies (Park et al. 2012: 119), but it seems that its impacts on democracy in the society have been relatively less well-considered.

Meanwhile, it is a notable point that the period when the Korean government implemented ICTs development plans intensively coincides with the period of the democratic consolidation in Korea. Regarding this, some optimists anticipated that digital communications could enhance democracy in Korea positively (see, Lyu 2006; Korean Association for Policy Studies [KAPS] 2011; Park et al. 2012; Chung 2015). More specifically, they argued that the digital use of the Korean government has something to do with strengthening democracy in the way of increasing public participation. According to them, given the highly increased digital penetration rates and digital accessibility, it has been regarded that equality among Koreans in terms of information access has been enhanced, and furthermore, led to the expansion of public participation in politics as well.

However, there is different point of view seeing that it is still not sure about “whether the digital media use is bringing about a fundamental change in the way that citizens are doing their politics” (Stoker 2006: 201). Given that, it is still unclear whether or not digital communication technologies have ultimately enhanced

democracy by expanding public participation to Korean politics. In addition, the immediacy, a nature of digital media that allows people to quickly and conveniently express their opinions, lead to social disruption due to the indiscreet dissemination of unidentified fake news produced by individuals. Against this backdrop, the Korean governments' attempts to regulate digital communications among the ordinary people in civil society is also regarded as a factor which compromises Korean democracy.

Considering this, the author tried to figure out how Korean digital communications have influenced democracy in Korea by solving the research question 2, ***“How has digital communication in Korea affected Korean democracy since 1993? Overall, what kind of democracy has it promoted and supported?”***. In this vein, Chapter 6 mainly focused on understanding how digital communication at the governmental level has been operated and how it has affected overall democracy in Korea. To solve the research question 2-1, ***“How has governmental digital communication affected democracy in Korea?”***, the author focused on the government's political use of digital media and attitudes to the digital communications first.

In this chapter, it was identified that the democratic implications of digital technology could differ depending on how the political regimes' different political purposes and ideologies are put into practice. More specifically, it was scrutinised how the past and present Korean governments have used digital media in the process of democratisation by comparing regimes based on opposed political ideologies, progressive and conservative. The democratic visions of the government's digital media use have been very dependent on the government's political objectives and ideologies. Ideological conflicts in Korean society based on the bi-partisan political system of Korea continuously kept occurring until the contemporary digital era.

According to the analyses, over the twenty-five years since the emergence of the first civilian regime, the Kim Young-sam government (1993-1998), Korean politics has accomplished regime changes between conservative and progressive powers. The Korean political system shifted from the authoritarian to the civilian regimes, During the political power shift, each government tended to show different directions and strategies in terms of sharing information and communicating with the people depending on the regime's characteristics. Moreover, the Korean progressive and conservative political forces have different points of view about digital communication and their contrasting responsiveness to digital communications among the people.

The Korean conservative regimes, such as the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye regimes, have had a symbiotic relationship with Chaebols and traditional conservative media power in maintaining political power. The conservative political forces put more emphasis on the representative nature of the politicians elected by the people. As the conservative regimes rely not on the public but representative forces in the society, it can be assumed that they did not tend to pay attention to the way to expand public participation through digital media. During the Lee Myung-bak regime, the government considered the public voices expressed through digital media as anti-government civic forces and tried to regulate them. Although political representatives have the responsibility to listen to the public voices and reflect them to political decision-making, the Korean conservative regimes tried to repress the public opinions that were shaped in digital spaces.

While the conservative regimes have set the agendas through traditional conservative media, the progressive regimes tend to use digital media to listen to the opinions of the people directly. Unlike the conservative regimes, the Korean progressive regimes have tried to enhance digital communications to lead to public

participation at the level of the open government and the public service provider. As digital media were regarded as useful tools to expand public participation, the progressive regimes tried to enhance digital communications to lead to public participation, which was effective to obtain political justification from the people. In this vein, it can be found that when the progressive regimes exerted power, there were undoubtedly more institutional and practical attempts with digital media.

The present governments in the digital age are no longer able to ignore the voices from the civil society which is formed by the people voluntarily. Since the present Moon Jae-in regime, as another progressive regime after the Roh regime, the government has been actively taking actions to increase public participation by running various digital communication channels. The Moon government has provided the public with diverse official digital platforms so that the people can freely express what they think and what they want from the government, which is opposite to the conservative regimes. It can mean that the Moon government sets official digital channels to collect the ordinary people's voices that used to be scattered on private digital channels during the conservative regimes. For the progressive regimes, digital media can be an effective public opinion monitoring tool as well as a tool for expanding participation of political supporters.

Many claimed that digital media have a function to compensate for this weakness of representative democracy, even though many conservative observers argue that the current government's direct communication with the people through digital channels undermines representative democracy. Above all, it is evident that the progressive and conservative regimes have supported the opposite concepts of democracies, direct, participatory democracy, and representative democracy, respectively. Considering the patterns of the Korean governments' digital media use,

Barber's (2001) argument that "The features of digital technology can serve a more participatory democracy" seems to be at least identified.

Chapter 7 focused on investigating social changes through digital communications among ordinary people in Korean society in the context of democratisation. To solve the research question 2-2 "***How has digital communication at the societal level affected democracy in Korea?***", the author focused on analysing the social phenomena with regard to digital communication of the people including offline political collective actions in the digital era. By doing so, the author tried to figure out the relationship between digital communication and democracy by examining the publics' freedom of expression and the government's regulation in a scale of the dynamic power relationship between the government and the public.

According to the investigation, turning to the digital era since the early 2000s, Koreans rapidly and actively adopted the use of digital media as a communication tool, and the publics' digital communications moved into a politics domain. Since the time when digital communication was widespread in Korean society, it seems that Koreans have not only secured equal access to public information and services but also obtained more opportunities to participate in political affairs. Furthermore, people began to shape public opinions by freely expressing their knowledge and personal opinions about various social issues such as politics, economics, and security on digital platforms. By sharing ideas freely, some degree of social consensus on political and social issues among the people could be reached.

In particular, it was identified that the public opinions established in digital spaces formed the development of large-scale political collective action independently from formal organisations (see, Kreiss 2012; Giansante 2015). Digital communications among the ordinary people played a crucial role in shaping collective civil power,

which considerably affected political evolution that led to the impeachment of the president. In this vein, it can be said that the ordinary people in Korean society have enhanced their citizenship not only by expressing their own voices to the government but also organising collective political actions in the digital age. Considering the recent political accomplishments of the collective public actions in the political realm, it seems evident that Koreans' digital communications have the potential to enhance direct, participatory democracy. Compared to the authoritarian era, it seems that the public's political power has become strong enough to face the government's power.

However, in reality, it is still doubted if Korea overall achieved democratic consolidation in that the government forces have violated the democratic rights of the people through excessive regulation and illegal actions. The recent Korean governments tended not to properly cope with various incidents resulting from the public's extended collective actions through digital communications. While the public has enhanced their political power by expressing their voices with diverse ways through digital media, at the same time, Korean governments have shown a stronger regulatory attitude against the public's criticism. Indeed, there have been various problems that compromised democracy in the contemporary digital Korean society, such as excessive regulation on the public's freedom of expression and manipulation of public opinion in relation to presidential elections in digital spaces.

Regarding the recent social issues such as the government's attempts to regulate digital communications among ordinary people and manipulate public opinions on digital platforms, Korean democracy seems to be compromised severely. It can be considered that the government's undemocratic reactions to the civil society have been stumbling block for Korea to become a democratic digital society. Moreover, the polarisation phenomena against the government seem to be reflected in digital spheres,

which are engendering social conflicts. Given that, it can be considered that the democratic potentials of digital technologies seem to be marginalised by the governments' operational approach (Lyu 2006: 266).

Despite the democratic implication of digital technologies, the Korean society could not expect to enhance democracy if the society uses digital technologies in an undemocratic way. Well-functioning democracy, or democratic consolidation, in the digital society, cannot be realised only by technology as it is, but by members of society. In this sense, “the real challenge is political, not technological, and if democracy is to benefit from the technology we will have to start not with technology but with politics” (Barber 2001).

8.3. Contribution of knowledge and research limitations

This case study intends to fill an empirical gap that was relatively less-researched, that is, the attitudes of the political regimes' to digital media and digital communication in civil society and digital political participation and mobilisation of Koreans. In this context, an in-depth analysis of Korea's digital development was conducted from the strategic governmental plans to current social and political phenomena in relation to digital communications among the members of the society.

Overall, this study has made contributions to the field of digital media communication in political context and democracy. When it comes to theoretical contributions of knowledge, this research has enhanced an understanding of the theory of democracy and the relationship between digital media communication and democracy in society, based on the Korean case. More specifically, this case study has contributed to identifying the role of digital media communication and the members of society including political leader and followers to understand democratic changes in

society. As the Korean case shows, it has turned out that the political implications of digital technology on democracy in society can be differently exerted depending on operations of the political regimes' different political purpose and ideologies.

Digital development in the world can be different in nature and may display various paths since each country has a varying cultural and historical background (Lyu 2006: 272). Given that, it is considered that the findings of this research should be treated as context-bound (Zhao 2016: 269). Nevertheless, it is also a universal idea that digital communication development has something to do with politics and democracy across the world. In this vein, the analytical result of this Korean case study particularly would work in applying to other Asian countries cases that have similar contexts in digital developmental processes and historical backgrounds and political arrangements (Lyu 2006: 272). Moreover, Korea's experiences in accordance with digital development at a national level can be applied to other developing countries that seek digital development across the world.

Despite the justification of the Korean case study, it is also important to recognise the nature of the case study and its sampling limitation (Zhao 2016: 269). In this vein, it is significant to consider that the findings of this research were understood by the case's context bounds. Thus, it is suggested that further studies need to either scrutinise the theoretical and empirical discrepancies or raise new theoretical understandings based on different countries' cases. Although the focus on Korea as a case sounds reasonable in examining democratic transformation in the digital age, comparative studies of similar discussions in other regions could help discover diverse democratic or undemocratic phenomena in relation to digital communications and deepen the theoretical framework.

At the beginning of the research process, the author mainly focused on web and documents analyses. In addition, all the analyses were based on the empirical research data assembled through fieldwork which was based on the preliminary analyses. In this study, the author tried to obtain a wide range of professional knowledge through interviews with experts by considering the nature of the research questions. Nonetheless, the available data used in this thesis were composed of only the interview data with a limited number of civil servants and experts in Korea. Thus, it may require a broader range of supplementary analysis data, such as census statistic data in order to build stronger casual conclusions.

Furthermore, although the Korean government's digital communication was complemented by web content analysis and extensive document analysis, many aspects that need to be explored still remain, such as the political intention behind the official digital platforms and the actual impacts of these digital channel operations on democracy. In this vein, further studies that are engaged with various political discourses in terms of democracy in the digital age and show multidimensional levels are needed. In the meantime, this study mainly focused on the central government and its regime changes rather than scrutinising local governments' cases. An analysis of local governments' digital communication with the public could enrich the understanding of digital media communication and of its impacts on democracy.

Another dimension lacking in this study is the assessment of political deliberation on digital channels. Even though this study demonstrated how digital media have been used in the political context first through case analyses, it was not easy to figure out how deliberation has been implemented between the government and the public, or among the public in civil society. Regarding this, there should be further studies that can identify how deliberation among the members of society is

implemented on digital platforms that the government provides to citizens. Furthermore, longitudinal research is needed that traces how the social consensus based on digital deliberation among the public through time has affected the political decision-making process.

Lastly, democracy is a conception with manifold definitions, but its basic tenets are unanimous in scholarly discussions (Oladepo 2015: 341) and the evaluation standards are relatively obvious. The author suggested the most representative concepts of democracies, which are direct, participatory democracy and representative democracy by comparing their features. However, there are variously named democracies in the contemporary digital age, and furthermore, the conceptions can be evaluated with different values from diverse perspectives. Although this study analysed democracy in the digital society in accordance with the democratic values, such as equality, freedom of expression, and public participation, there are more specific humanitarian and societal aspects which need to be considered in evaluating democracy in a society. Therefore, further studies need to focus on newly emerged democratic issues in relation to a digital society by considering more diverse democratic values.

8.4. Concluding remarks

With the development of digital media used in various types of political communications and public participation through digital media, many challenges in terms of the relationships between digital technologies and democratic transformation have been raised in the academic field. In this context, through the Korean case study, the author tried to illustrate how the political and societal democratisation of a democratic society proceeds in the digital age. Through the Korean case study, it was identified that digital media communication plays a crucial role in shaping democracy

in a contemporary democratic country in the digital age. More specifically, it was acknowledged that digital communication has a democratic function, which specifically supports direct and participatory democracies. By conducting empirical analysis with both microscopic and macroscopic perspectives, this research tried to enrich not only a theoretical understanding of democracy in the digital age but also empirical findings of a contemporary politics deeply embedded digital technology through this thesis.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Korean governmental organisations' digital channels analysis

Organisations	Webpage	Other Components of Webpage	Language	Other Digital Channels
<i>Strategy and Finance</i>	<i>Government 3.0 Release of information News Policy Statistics Ordinance Civil complaints</i>	<i>Electronic discussion Conversation with the minister video news policy focus daily economic data press release & elucidation materials publications Youth visiting program Children economic class page e-newsletter service Direct links to other sites</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 66.701) Twitter (tweet 8.819, following 19.206, followers 38.065 heart 3 list 2 posts 1.808) 2010.03 Blog (Today 2.912 Total 2.086.453 following 2.354 followers 8.460) Naver posts (followers 2397, posts 71) YouTube (continuous posting subscribers 2.392) Minister's Facebook</i>
<i>Education</i>	<i>Public participation/ Civil complaints Policy promotion Policy Government 3.0 Release of Information Information of the Ministry Introduction of the Ministry</i>	<i>Budget & audit Work plans Main policy challenges Government 3.0 education site video & photo news Children page School & student information Press release Ordinance Direct links to other sites</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 121.112) Twitter (tweet 11.026, following 26.221, followers 37.014 heart 45 list 4 posts 675) 2010.05 Blog (Today 692 Total 2.839.373 /</i>

				<i>following 953 followers 7979)</i> <i>YouTube (continuous posting)</i> <i>Band (member 20.520)</i> <i>KakaoStory (follower 17.792 posts 764)</i>
<i>Science, ICT and Future planning</i>	<i>Release of Information</i> <i>Public participation</i> <i>News</i> <i>Policy</i> <i>Creative Economy</i> <i>Future contents</i> <i>Introduction of the ministry</i>	<i>Listening to national anthem</i> <i>Work plans, budget</i> <i>Conversation with the minister</i> <i>Photo news</i> <i>Introduction of creative economic</i> <i>Press release & video</i> <i>Event notice</i> <i>Direct links to other sites</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 44.704 evaluation 4.5/5 visitors comments 31)</i> <i>Twitter (twit 6.356, following 7.824, followers 15.336 heart 364 posts 2.278)</i> <i>2013.04</i> <i>Blog (Today 7.032 Total 3.369.646 visitors' comments)</i> <i>YouTube (subscribers 668)</i>
<i>Foreign affairs</i>	<i>Travel/staying abroad</i> <i>information</i> <i>News</i> <i>Issue reference room</i> <i>Nations and region information</i> <i>Public participation</i> <i>Government 3.0 release of information</i> <i>Introduction of the</i>	<i>President's overseas trip</i> <i>Embassy information</i> <i>Comport women-related agreement/ North Korea nuclear issue/ Dok-do issue</i> <i>Report corruption</i> <i>Visiting program</i> <i>Conversation with the minister</i> <i>Contribution & interviews</i> <i>Spokesperson briefing</i> <i>Youth page</i> <i>Quick click service</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 128.474)</i> <i>Twitter (twit 13.659, following 33.235, followers 71.458 heart 186 list 2 posts 3.359)</i> <i>2010.06</i> <i>Blog (Today 2.287 Total 2.043.184/</i>

	<i>ministry</i>			<i>following 923 followers 8.014) YouTube (subscribes 12.560) Live MOFA TV KTV</i>
<i>Unification</i>	<i>Notice Interaction Government 3.0 release of information Publications Main Policy Introduction of ministry</i>	<i>Conversation with the minister Gaeseoung Industrial Complex/ Separated family/ language barrier Statistics Report corruption Press release related to unification Event notice Policy video</i>	<i>Korean English Chinese</i>	<i>Facebook (like 103.982, review points: 4.5/5 visitors' comments 48) Twitter (tweet 7.091, following 11.959, followers 24.862 heart 294 list 3 posts 1.169) 2010.05 Blog (today 9.576 total 5.755.157) YouTube (subscribers 5.710) Flickr (following 1, followers 15 posts 2.191) 2010 UniTV, me2day</i>
<i>Justice</i>	<i>Government 3.0 Release of information Public participation News Policy participation Legal information Introduction of ministry Online Civil complaints</i>	<i>Remote support (e.g. video interview) Media release Public voices (consulting, report, suggestions) Electronic discussions Surveys Children page Mobile service</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 90.547 visitors' comments) Twitter (tweet 7.324, following 14.480, followers 41.888 heart 88 list 2) Blog (posts 4.407)</i>

				<i>YouTube</i> (subscribers 407)
<i>National Defense</i>	<i>Policy (budget, army etc.) Information of defense Civil defense Introduction of the ministry</i>	<i>Children page THAAD/ North Korea nuclear Conversation with the minister press release & elucidation materials K-force TV & radio Help call Notice Information of military service Quick link service</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook</i> (like 279.058 visitors' comments) 2011.05 <i>Twitter</i> (twit 6.914, following 32.554, followers 40.332 heart 134 list 3 posts 1.427) 2010.04 <i>Blog</i> (posts 253) <i>YouTube</i> (subscribers 13.069) <i>KakaoStory</i> (recipients 102.359, posts 1.417) <i>Naver posts</i> (following 12 followers 875 posts 151 like 112)
<i>Interior</i>	<i>Release of information Customer complaints News, information Policy materials Guide of task Introduction of ministry</i>	<i>Main policy = Government 3.0 Local budget plan Conversation with the minister Report corruption e-newsletter service Press release & elucidation materials Children page</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook</i> (like 66.982, review points: 3.4/5 visitors' comments 179) <i>Twitter</i> (twit 15.355, following 41.149, followers 53.380 heart 1.411 list 31 posts 3.483) 2010.03 <i>Blog</i> (today 16.581 total 127.045 posts

				997) YouTube (subscribers 930) Kakao Talk (friends 99.266) Minister's Facebook (like 778)
<i>Culture, Sports and Tourism</i>	<i>Government 3.0 release of information Civil complaints Notice, information Cultural information Materials Main policy Introduction of ministry Korean cultural centre</i>	<i>Children page Mobile web, app Press release & elucidation materials Conversation with the minister Culture SNS Report sports corruption e-newsletter service</i>	<i>Korean English Chinese Japanese</i>	<i>Facebook (like 132.756 visitors' comments) Twitter (tweet 8.893, following 26.654, followers 56.916 heart 11 list 5 posts 1.989) 2010.05 Blog (Today 3.649 Total 1.434.613 followers 5.950 posts 4.813) YouTube (continuous posting) Instagram (posts 197 following 2.012 followers 5.218)</i>
<i>Food Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs</i>	<i>Government 3.0 release of information Regulatory reform Public interaction Notice and information Government tasks Policy promotion Introduction of ministry Operation guide</i>	<i>My page Mafra TV KTV Korean policy TV Mailing service Children page Women farmers' page</i>	<i>Korean Chinese English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 48.812) Twitter (tweet 10.790, following 53.805, followers 63.738 heart 1.618 list 27 posts 1.725) 2010.02 Blog (Today</i>

				1.072 Total 200.494 followers 2.130) YouTube (subscribers 408) KakaoStory (recipients 6.637 posts 563)
Trade, Industry and Energy	Government 3.0 release of information Public complaints and participation Notice and news Policy and information Budget and ordinance Introduction and guide	Sub chapters (Industry & Technology/ Trade & Investment/ International trade, FTA/ Energy & Resources) Daily Industry Trend Regulatory reform Report complaints Electronic discussion, Survey	Korean English	Facebook (like 122.778) Twitter (twit 9.685, following 28.380, followers 37.580 heart 204 list 3 posts 3.497) 2010.04 Blog (Today 3.356 Total 7.595.388 posts 8.167) YouTube (subscribers 426)
Health and Welfare	Government 3.0 release of information Public complaints Participation Information Notice Introduction Policy Operation guide	Mobile Application Report complaints E-newsletter service Mobile service Children page	Korean English	Facebook (like 116.063) Twitter (twit 10.638, following 49.292, followers 55.207 heart 153 list 11 posts 2.054) 2009.11 Blog (Today 1.690 Total 200.992 / posts 747) YouTube (subscribers 9.417) KakaoStory

				(recipients 4.295 posts 538) Naver Q&A service
<i>Environ ment</i>	<i>Government 3.0 release of information Public participation Ordinance and Policy Publications Notice and PR Introduction of ministry</i>	<i>Conversation with the ministry e-environment news Mobile service Report corruption Ordinance Frequent menu Publications & video Notice Direct links to other sites Press release & elucidation materials</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 104.502) Twitter (twit 7.897, following 36.155, followers 44.934 heart 283 list 1 posts 2.849) 2010.03 Blog (Today 3.579 Total 5.886.500 posts 2.084) YouTube (subscribers 9.450)</i>
<i>Employ ment and Labour</i>	<i>Public complaints Participations Notice Release of information Policy Introduction of ministry</i>	<i>Conversation with the ministry Subject-specific policy / Issue-specific policy Press release Children page Mobile service Ordinance, Notice e-statistics about employment and labour Direct links to other sites Quick click service</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 117,394) events provided Twitter (twit 7,627, following 29,592, followers 34,627 heart 27 list 8) - Images provided Blog (Today 13.766 Total 12,637,627) YouTube (continuous posting) KakaoStory (Recipients 51. 886, posts 1.116)</i>

<i>Gender Equality and Family Republic of Korea</i>	<i>Information service by subjects Electoral public complaints Government 3.0 release of information News and information Policy Introduction of ministry</i>	<i>Quick click service (e.g. Career break female, Comport women, Multicultural family, Single parent family, Women intelligence etc.) Policy today —other organisations' policy information Press release & elucidation materials Video, Photo, Card news Children page Mobile service</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 30.166 visitors' comments 485 evaluation 1.3) Twitter (twit 7.437, following 5.223, followers 21.841 heart 301 posts 914) 2010.05 Blog (Total 619.855 Today 12.114/ friends 3.474 posts 2.469) YouTube (continuous posting)</i>
<i>Land, Infrastructure and Transport</i>	<i>Government 3.0 release of information Public complaints Land and transport News Notice Information Policy Introduction of ministry</i>	<i>Conversation with the ministry press release & elucidation materials Policy materials Children & Youth page Mobile service</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 83.527 visitors' comments) Twitter (twit 17.934, following 38.833, followers 75.670 heart 33 list 3 posts 4.096) 2010.09 Blog (posts 3.689) - Children and Youth journalists) YouTube (subscribers 2.229) KakaoStory (Recipients 25.027 posts 372)</i>

<i>Ocean and Fisheries</i>	<i>Government 3.0 release of information Public complaints Information Policy Information Ordinance Introduction of ministry</i>	<i>‘Sewol’ ferry compensation quick click service Public suggestions Regulatory reform Report complaints Press release</i>	<i>Korean English</i>	<i>Facebook (like 43.483, within 1 hour answering service) Twitter (twitter 2.856, following 18.938, follower 19.445 list 120) Blog (Today 5.399 Total 2.882.781) YouTube (continuous posting)</i>
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Appendix 2. List of interviewees

<Civil Servants of Ministries in Korea>

Ministry of Interior and Safety [MOIS] (MOIS meeting room, Seoul/ 29.07.2017)

- 1. Kim, D. H. (Deputy director of Smart Service Division)***
- 2. Kang, B. R. (Practitioner of Public Relations Division)***

Ministry of Education [MOE] (MOE meeting room, Sejong-si/ 13.09.2017)

- 3. Moon, K. M. (Practitioner of Director of Public Relations under the Spokesperson/ previous Practitioner of Director of Public Relations in Local Education Office)***

Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism [MCST]

- 4. Jeon, S. O. (A previous Director of the Bureau of Public Information of Government Information Agency [GIA] and Director of Public Opinion Division) (MCST meeting room/ 29.09.2017)***
- 5. Lee, J. M. (Contracted Professional) (Deputy director of Online Communication Division-Contracted) (MCST meeting room/ 13.09.2017)***
- 6. Choi, C. W. (Practitioner of Online Communication Division/Contracted Professional) (MCST meeting room / 13.09.2017)***
- 7. Lee, J. S. (Executive Director/Korea National Diplomatic Academy) (KNDA meeting room, Seoul/ 21.09.2017)***
- 8. Anonymous (Practitioner of the Online Communication Division)
*Written interview through email (04.09.2017)***

Ministry of Strategy and Finance [MOSF]

- 9. Anonymous (Director for Public Relations) (MOSF Office, Sejong-si/ 07.09.2017)***
- 10. Cho, H. J. (Director of Public Relations Media Team) (MOSF Office, Sejong-si/ 07.09.2017)***
- 11. Song, B. C. (Director of different divisions of MOSF (2007-2015)/Korea National Diplomatic Academy) (KNDA meeting room, Seoul/ 21.09.2017)***

Ministry of Science and ICT [MSIT]

- 12. Oh, Y. S. (Director General/Korea National Diplomatic Academy) (KNDA meeting room, Seoul/ 21.09.2017)***

Seoul City Hall

- 1. Kim, T. K. (Director General of Policy Planning/Korea National Diplomatic Academy) (KNDA meeting room, Seoul/ 21.09.2017)***
- 2. Yang, S. O. (New Media Strategic Consultant/ Media Strategy Team in New Media Division/Contracted Professional) (Meeting room at Seoul City Hall, Seoul/ 20.09.2017)***

Government Information Agency [GIA] and Cheong Wa Dae (Sejong Cultural Foundation meeting room, Sejong-si/ 26.09.2017)

1. **Lyn, B. T.** (Previous Senior Director of the Bureau of Public Information (1980-2006)/Present Executive Director of Korea Policy & PR Institute and Representative of Sejong Cultural Foundation)

<Researchers in Korean Think-Tanks>

Korea Legislation Research Institute [KLRI] (KLRI office, Sejong-si/ 11.09.2017)

1. **Choi, H. Y.** (Senior Researcher/Director General of Research Planning Division)
2. **Ryu, H. Y.** (Senior Researcher/Director of Research Planning Division)

Korea Information Society Development Institute [KISDI]

3. **Lee, W. T.** (Senior Researcher/Director of Digital Society Policy Group in ICT Strategy Research Division) (Private meeting space, Seoul/ 22.09.2017)

Science and Technology Policy Institute [STEPI]

4. **Um, M. J.** (Senior Researcher/Director of Strategy & Planning Division) (STEPI office, Sejong-si/ 11.09.2017)

<Academics in Korea>

1. **Woo, Y. S.** (Professor of Department of Administration) (Office at Soongsil University, Seoul/ 15.09.2017)
 - Previous civil servant (1992-2005)
 - Anti-Corruption & Civil Right Commission investigator in 2014
 - Government Reform Trends and Implications related Government 3.0.
 - The Korean Association for Public Administration [KAPA], 1852-1882. (2013) etc.
2. **Kim, M. K.** (Previous professor of Department of Journalism, Public Relations and Advertising) (Private meeting space, Seoul/18.09.2017)
 - Seoul Brand Promotion Committee Chairperson in 2015
3. **Song, K. J.** (Professor of an Institute for Human Society) (Office at Kyunghee University, Seoul/ 27.09.2017)
 - Internet Information Resources and Self-Regulation: Suggestions for Korean Self-Regulatory Problems (2010).
 - Internet and Election Culture in the 4.11 general election (2012).
 - Korea Internet Self-governance Organisation [KISO] etc.

<External Professional in Korea>

Korean Government PR Agency (PRONE meeting room, Seoul/ 28.09.2017)

1. Cho, J. Y. (President of PRONE, LTD⁹¹/Ph.D. in Public Relations)

⁹¹ http://www.prone.co.kr/page_e.php?idx=39 /

Appendix 3. Interview theme and questions for civil servants (senior civil servants)

Historical Background

1. *What kinds of global trends have affected Korea's media context?*
2. *What kinds of factors affected Korea's becoming the leading example of a country rising from a low level of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) access to one of the highest in the world?*
3. *What were the major reasons of the Korean government's massive investment?*
4. *What have the major changes been each regime since 1993?*
5. *What kinds of developmental communication ideology have prevailed in Korea since 1993?*
6. *Is the development of the ICT industry related to financial crisis in the late 1990s?*
7. *Why has freedom of political expression in Korea lagged behind since 2008? What happened in 2008? – in relation to the candlelight vigil in 2008*

Changes of the government's digital communications

1. *Do you think the present governmental organisations tend to rely more on the digital media as a means of communication? If so, why?*
2. *How different the plans of the current government in terms of public communications compared to previous regimes, and what plans do they have in the future?*
3. *What specific efforts are made by Korean government agencies to communicate with the public?*
4. *Has the governmental organisations' digital media use as a communication tool reduced the costs of producing and disseminating political information?*
5. *Do the government's digital communications expand the scope of government information disclosure?*

Appendix 4. Interview theme and questions for civil servants (digital communication practitioners)

Implementation of the government's digital communications

1. *What intentions, strategies, and objectives of the governmental digital communication? How are these related to political events?*
2. *What kinds of digital platforms do the governmental organisations use? Do you have different intentions of using these digital channels, respectively?*
3. *What do you share with the public through digital media? And how?*
4. *What kinds of proactive roles in digital platforms do the governmental organisations play?*
5. *How do you select information to open to the people?*
6. *Do you monitor regularly the public's opinions on digital channels? If so, what kinds of ideas, topics and opinions mainly do the public share on the digital media channels?*
7. *How do you control the public opinions/claims on the digital platforms you use?*
8. *By what criteria do people's voices be reflected to policy-making process?*
9. *What kinds of challenges do Korean governmental organisations encounter in relation to the digital era?*
10. *What suggestions would you offer for the management of digital media, and what measures should be taken immediately?*

Appendix 5. Common interview questions for civil servants

Implications of digital communications to democracy

1. *Compared to the previous media era, have public political participation increased due to digital communications of the government?*
2. *Have the digital media usages of governmental organisations contributed to provide the public with equal access to political processes? If so, how?*
3. *What changes did the digital communications lead in terms of the way of interactions between the governmental organisations and the public?*
4. *Did the government's usages of digital media change the relationship between the government and the public? If so, how?*
5. *Does the present digital communication system promote and support democracy? If so, what kinds of democracies do the digital communication systems promote and support?*
6. *Do you think digital interactions between the government and the public affected the Korea's democratic consolidation? If so, how?*

Appendix 6. Interview themes and questions for Experts (Researchers, Academics, and External professional)

Historical Background (same questions as ones for senior civil servants)

1. *What kinds of global trends have affected Korea's media context?*
2. *What kinds of factors affected Korea's becoming the leading example of a country rising from a low level of digital access to one of the highest in the world?*
3. *What were the major reasons of the Korean government's massive investment?*
4. *What have the major changes been each regime since 1993?*
5. *What kinds of developmental communication ideology have prevailed in Korea since 1993?*
6. *Is the development of the ICT industry related to financial crisis in the late 1990s?*
7. *Why has freedom of political expression in Korea lagged behind since 2008? What happened in 2008? – in relation to the candlelight vigil in 2008*

Understanding of Korean politics

1. *Are there differences in the direction of government communication due to media diversification compared to the past?*
2. *Can you explain how distinguish the communication philosophies of the progressive / conservative regimes separately?*
3. *How are the characteristics of each regime in terms of political communication initiatives different?*
4. *Although digital communication development has contributed to the development of democracy, and what do you think the reason why Korean society is still non-democratic?*

Implications of digital communications to democratic society

1. *How are the relations between the Korean democratisation process and Korea's digital communications? Are they independent, or tightly linked? Or one drove the other?*

2. *What functions of the development of digital communications have operated within the Korea's democratisation process?*
3. *Do digital media communications in the present society play a crucial role in functioning democracy? If so, how?*
4. *Do digital communications in Korean society enhance democracies (participatory democracy, representative democracy, and deliberative democracy)?*
5. *Compared to the traditional media era, do you think the digital media communications have increased public participation in politics?*
6. *Compared to the traditional media era, do you think the digital media communications have expanded Korean's freedom to speech?*
7. *Compared to the traditional media era, do you think the digital media communications in Korean society have reduced digital divide among people?*
8. *Do you think digital communications in general affected the Korea's democratic consolidation? If so, how?*
9. *What kinds of social problems in relation to the digital communications among people does the Korean society go through?*
10. *Can you give suggestions in relation to how and in what way the digital communications in the Korean society should be operated?*

Appendix 7. Categorised petitions of the ‘Kukmin Cheongwon (National Petition)’

	Topic	Participants	Date		
	Categories		Start	End	Answer
1	Human rights/Gender equality	296,330	03.09.2017	02.11.2017	25.09.2017
2	Human rights/Gender equality	235,372	30.09.2017	30.10.2017	26.11.2017
3	Safety/Environment	216,774	04.11.2017	04.12.2017	06.12.2017
4	Future	615,354	06.09.2017	05.12.2017	
5	Health/Welfare	281,985	17.11.2017	17.12.2017	16.01.2018
6	Others	211,064	24.11.2017	24.12.2017	25.01.2018
	Growth Engine	255,554	03.12.2017	02.01.2018	
7	Growth Engine	228,295	28.12.2017	27.01.2018	14.02.2018
8	Health/Welfare	252,969	05.02.2018	07.03.2018	20.02.2018
9	Humanity/Gender equality	213,219	06.01.2018	05.02.2018	27.02.2018
10	Humanity/Gender equality	233,842	03.01.2018	02.02.2018	02.03.2018
11	Culture/Art/Sports/Media	614,127	19.02.2018	21.03.2018	06.03.2018
12	Diplomacy/Unification/Defense	360,905	20.01.2018	19.02.2018	
13	Political reform	277,674	15.01.2018	14.02.2018	08.03.2018
14	Culture/Art/Sports/media	212,992	18.01.2018	17.02.2018	
15	Transportation/Architecture/Land	219,395	14.01.2018	13.02.2018	14.03.2018
16	Safety/Environment	235,167	25.01.2018	24.02.2018	23.03.2018
17	Humanity/Gender equality	242,687	23.02.2018	25.03.2018	
18	Economic democratisation	207,772	08.02.2018	10.03.2018	09.04.2018
19	Culture/Art/Sports/Media	208,522	17.02.2018	19.03.2018	13.04.2018
20	Humanity/Gender equality	235,796	26.02.2018	28.03.2018	
21	Humanity/Gender equality	222,770	03.03.2018	02.04.2018	
22	Child care/Education	217,054	23.02.2018	25.03.2018	24.04.2018
23	Political reform	304,320	03.13.2018	12.04.2018	02.05.2018
24	Administration	302,082	17.04.2018	17.05.2018	04.05.2018
25	Others	216,886	12.03.2018	11.04.2018	08.05.2018
26	Safety/Environment	278,128	24.03.2018	23.04.2018	16.05.2018
27	Humanity/Gender equality	419,006	11.05.2018	10.06.2018	21.05.2018
28	Safety/Environment	209,494	23.03.2018	22.04.2018	
29	Humanity/Gender equality	201,325	05.17.2018	16.06.2018	
30	Safety/Environment	215,036	28.03.2018	27.04.2018	25.05.2018
31	Economic democratisation	242,286	06.04.2018	06.05.2018	31.05.2018
32	Political reform	260,624	16.04.2018	16.05.2018	06.05.2018
33	Others	216,163	15.04.2018	15.05.2018	11.06.2018
34	Others	334,173	02.05.2018	01.06.2018	
35	Culture/Art/Sports/Media	234,714	14.04.2018	14.05.2018	14.06.2018

Source: Cheong Wa Dae ‘Kukmin Cheongwon (National Petition)’ homepage